

FAQ(FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)

What is ANKUR?

ANKUR has been an active functioning body since when we came to University of Pittsburgh as graduate students, when our seniors came and when their seniors came and so on. ANKUR doesn't have a full form but it is the other name to Indian Graduate Student Organisation. It was formed to help and support indian students who are landing at US for graduate studies at UPitt, for conducting cultural activities and many such, that make them feel at home away from home.

When should I start looking for accomodation?

ASAP. You should ideally finalize your residence in Pittsburgh well in advance and before you land. As you get closer to August, it becomes increasingly hard to find a decent place.

How should I look for houses?

The Pitt housing groups and Carnegie Mellon housing groups on facebook are extremely helpful. Ankur IGSA also has their own facebook page where housing is discussed. Other useful websites are Trulia, Zillow, Craigslist, Hotpads and Apartments.com. Some popular managements are Meyers management, Lobos management, Arbors management, Union Real Estate, McQuarter's realty co etc. (they have their own websites). None of these websites charge any brokerage fees and you deal directly with Landlord or management. Pitt also has an off campus housing search website called [OCL](https://www.ocl.pitt.edu/exploring-campus-living).

Links:

https://www.facebook.com/groups/816037598451517/?ref=group_header
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HousingAndRoommatesInPittsburgh/>
<https://www.ocl.pitt.edu/exploring-campus-living>
<https://sublttr.com/>

What are some important questions to ask landlords?

OR

What would you guys say that a newcomer must keep in mind before signing a one year lease for renting apartment ?

1. Are utilities included in the rent? What utilities will I be paying for separately?
2. Are washing machines and dryers both available?
3. Is it close to major bus routes?
4. How close is the pitt shuttle stop?
5. Can you provide me with a video of the house?
6. Which floor is the house on? (basements have their own set of problems)
7. How far is it from my college building?
8. Are there any rodent/ pest issues?
9. Who shovels the front of your apartment during snow?

What kind of apartments should I avoid?

From what we've heard and from our experience, basement apartments should be avoided as they get super chilly during winters. Going for new buildings would be good because you can save on expenses on utilities such as gas or electricity.

What are some important things to know about household utilities?

It is most important to see if your heat is on electricity or gas. Generally gas bill is included as a part of utilities whereas electricity is paid separately. So heat on electricity shoots up the bill more than A/C usage. Also see if the apartment has a wooden floor or carpet. Carpets are more warm and comfortable. This is because electricity bills can rise by 100-200\$ in winters because of heater.

What happens if I get below 100 in TOEFL?

You will have to give an English proficiency test before your academic hold is lifted to register for courses. You can register for the test at

<https://www.linguistics.pitt.edu/esl-tesol/english-language-proficiency-test>

The test is free of cost.

Exceptions: Pharmacy students have to give this test even if you scored above 100.

What are pros and cons for different living options in Pittsburgh?

On campus living (ocl.pitt.edu) by Pitt is a very good option as you get free [saferiders](#) in the night, no electricity bill, no security deposit, quick maintenance. But you should have to show that you have taken all the vaccinations.

Off Campus living includes that you pay for wifi+rent and all the other utilities separately and an additional security deposit as well.

Three most suitable areas for students are: Oakland (it is the heart of University campus), Shadyside(it is close to all the important locations for students - University, Groceries and buses to downtown) and Squirrel Hill (peaceful clean neighbourhood, with excellent apartments for students at really affordable prices)

In all cases, looking for an apartment on the bus routes of 71 and 61 buses is key to connectivity and/or the [bus shuttle routes](#) 10A, 20A/B (check what are pitt shuttle [here](#))

What do I do for housing in Pittsburgh?

Temporary accommodation will be provided for the incoming batch for a maximum of one week. We must warn you first off that Ankur will NOT help you look for apartments. The grunt work will be yours.

The Housing section of the Ankur website answers some questions about housing and accommodation. The popular locations for grad student housing as mentioned on the Ankur website are Oakland, Shadyside and Squirrel Hill. While selecting a potential house, certain points to consider are:

The apartment should be on the bus-line or at least close to it. This is really important in winter because if your house is more than two blocks away, you will have to walk in the cold. Trust us, it is not very pleasant.

Also, please look for apartments close to or at least a reasonable distance from the grocery store. A popular chain of grocery stores in Pittsburgh is Giant Eagle.

The main Giant Eagle locations are:

Shadyside – 5550 Centre Avenue & at the crossing of Shady avenue and Ellsworth Avenue
Squirrel Hill – 1901 Murray Avenue

Therefore, if you find an apartment in Oakland (which is in the University area) then you will have to take a bus to the Grocery store or rely on the local Indian Stores in the vicinity. There are 2 Indian stores in Oakland: one on Atwood Street (called “Bombay Mart”) and one on South Craig Street (called “Kohli’s”). You’ll get practically everything you require for cooking Indian dishes in these two places.

What is this concept of “Utilities” that people talk of regarding the rent?

Utility bills include your bills for heating (gas / electric), cooking (gas / electric) and electricity.

The possible options are –

Rent covers everything (Rent – utilities included): That’s the best deal as you don’t have to worry about paying any extra bills every month.

Rent doesn’t cover electricity (Rent - utilities included except electricity): Most common. In this case make sure that the room heating and cooking is on gas. This will ensure that you will not pay more than approx \$20/month for your lighting + fans and stuff. Get this deal!

Rent doesn’t cover any utilities (Rent – utilities separate): Bad scenario. This would mean that you will have to pay separate bills for all the utilities. Worst case scenario – your house is old with heat leakage.

Do you suggest it is viable to rent a furnished house or unfurnished? Given that I am going to stay in Pittsburgh for a long term.

It depends on you. If you don't want to put in the effort of buying stuff and then having it moved or assembled or whatever then it's better to get a furnished apartment/room. Make sure that cost is also a factor that you consider while deciding for the same.

The motive is to know the cost implications and the logistic flexibility in moving stuff around. Can you say something along those lines?

One option for buying furniture is Amazon/Ikea where you get stuff and you assemble/disassemble as and when you like and it's easy to carry it, take it out once your lease is done. The church sale is a good option as they will also transport all the stuff that you choose to your house for free, so if you have an unfinished apartment then it works but you have to deal with it once your lease ends. You will save a lot of money here.

To transport stuff, people generally rent a u-haul truck and move it themselves to the new apartment or just leave it there for the next tenants. Also if you’re getting used furniture, be careful and make sure they don’t carry bed bugs. Since your rooms will have carpets, bed bugs can become a nuisance.

When should I sign the lease, before paying the security deposit or after paying the security deposit?

You must always try to sign the lease before paying the security deposit (even if you're in India and have decided the apartment and are going to sign the lease). Email your landlord to send you a copy of the lease that you could sign and send back to them. In some cases, the landlord may not oblige to share the lease with you in which case it is good idea to do a quick double check with someone on the ANKUR team if you're doubtful about frauds.

How do I contact landlords at their calling numbers that they provide on zillow and other rental information websites, when I haven't yet left India?

You can always email the landlord or the rental agency and they respond quickly. Sometimes owing to public holidays (Last Monday in May is Memorial Day and 4th July is Independence Day), but fret not, they will definitely respond actively to your e-mails. In case of emergencies, switch a plan from India to make calls at 100Rs/hr rates.

Have any of you guys purchased Renter's Insurance?

we have default renters insurance from our realtor. It's like 10\$ per month. It doesn't cover anything tough but is a compulsory requirement for the realtor. you can get your own, if you are paranoid about theft fires or any such other mishaps.

Where do I find furniture for my house?

Most graduate students rely on garage sales and moving sales. At these sales, you can buy basic amenities for the house, like lamps, cheap furniture, crockery items, shelves, tables, etc. These are advertised on Craig's List (<http://pittsburgh.craigslist.org/>) and also on street intersections. Keep your eyes peeled for notices on the lamp posts on street intersections. These would be your best bet, because most of these moving sales will be in and around of where you live and it will be easier to cart anything that you may purchase. In addition (if you are rich), you can look at Ikea furniture store, they have reasonably priced furniture. The pharmacy stores (not just medicines) here are Rite Aid, CVS Pharmacy. In addition you also have Eckerd, which is a pharmacy store and more. One of these is located on Forbes Avenue in Oakland, which is in the University area.

Is there a direct flight from X to Pittsburgh?

https://www.google.com/flights#flt=/m/068p2..2019-06-13*/m/068p2.2019-06-17;c:USD;e:1;ls:1w;sd:0;t:h

By when should I book tickets to Pittsburgh?

You can book at the time of your convenience, it is ideal that the land day is not earlier than 2-3 days from the start day of the orientation.

There is a New Graduate and Professional Orientation mentioned in the academic calendar on 20th August. Is it necessary to attend?

Yes.

Lufthansa, Emirates have 2 holds which I think is very tiring. Can you please recommend flights which have single holds ?

I know of an Air France flight which was Mumbai-Paris-Pittsburgh. I had taken that one. It was really good. The time distribution was almost equal, so I found it good. I'm not so sure about a similar flight from New Delhi though. Most flights to Pittsburgh have two layovers usually, you might need to spend a little more if you wanna have just one stop. Air France and British airways have direct routes to Pittsburgh

Should I apply for driving license separately for Pittsburgh, or shall I apply for international license?

You can drive in US with the Indian driver's license upto 1 year.

To apply for driver's license here, visit this link

<https://www.dmv.pa.gov/Driver-Services/Driver-Licensing/Pages/get-driver-license.aspx>

Do you celebrate Indian festivals in Pittsburgh?

Yes. ANKUR organises 3-4 events for this. India Day on Aug 15th, Diwali and Holi. We also set up a trip to SV temple during Diwali so people can burst crackers.

Are mangoes available easily and at reasonable prices there in summer?

We get mangoes at reasonable prices in ALDI, but they don't taste as good as in India. You can ask at your home to get aamras not actual mangoes to be sent here. You get Mexican mangoes at Indian stores, but they don't taste so well.

Any good airline flyers that offer good deals?

Qatar Airways, Delta Airlines, and more. Most of the airlines offer extra baggage of one additional package for students.

Do you know any good flight deals?

Official website for qatarairways has some good student offers.

<https://www.qatarairways.com/en-in/offers/cug/students-offer.html>

Register on this link and use student promo code that will be sent to your mail while booking your ticket.

MakeMyTrip also has offers to convert normal ticket to a student ticket if we send copies of passport, I20 and visa.

What is the port of entry to University?

Pittsburgh Intl Airport. It would be where you first land in usa, where your connection is you are free to choose. It can be any city in the country. The first city you land at in the US is the port of entry. Port of entry can be any dock as well if u decide to travel via sea

I heard from people that VO s are asking the port of entry question?How can we tell them without booking the tickets?

Just tell them that you will book the ticket after your Visa is accepted. But it's better to book the tickets now.Buy refundable tickets just in case

In my VISA interview if they ask “Why US as a Masters/PhD Student”?

Then say something personalized. I like ____ courses that are offered there.. Also the exposure is very good.. I feel I will be able to learn a lot more,etc.

Hint: If you're in Mumbai, go to visa officer number 37 😂.. He's from Pitt. 😂😂... But idk if they shuffle the officers and windows

So any tips for visa interivew?

For a question like why Pittsburgh, If your course has a good ranking, you could mention that- For Example: Physical Therapy is ranked #1 in the US.

You can say it's a educational hub of Pennsylvania! Pitt, CMU, Duquesne are in Pittsburgh. It attracts huge influx of foreign students.

some people were asked what the college mascot is -answer ROC the Panther

Mark Cuban is from Pittsburgh You can say Mark Cuban is from Pittsburgh.... i want to be like him in future

The motto for the University of Pittsburgh Veritas et Virtus is Latin for truth and virtue

Before any important match/exam, people rub the nose of the panther statue on campus for good luck!

Anything special in Pittsburgh or why pitts city is different from other cities in USA? - It is the steel city and home to United States Steel Corporation!

Pittsburgh is the home to 7 universities: CMU, Pitt, Dusquene, Carlow, Chatham, Point Park, Slippery Rock

Pittsburgh has about 400 bridges connecting the city across the 3 rivers that meet at the Point in Downtown. The rivers: Allegheny, Ohio and monongahela river

Which mode of payment is better for visa appointment booking? Over the counter or NEFT/imps?

NEFT works best.

Also check:

<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/wait-times.html#>

Receipt number is the last 12 digits of the TIER, correct?how much time does it take to activate?

Except the first digit.Within a day it should activate!

So what airlines would be better?

Anything that's cheapest. I preferred etihad because of pre clearance thing. And airbus a380 airliner personal choice though.

So we have to come to US with the route: Indian city to Pittsburgh?

You can book a flight with 2 stops, it is not an issue. Direct flight or flights via different stops

What about luggage? Will the airport accepts higher luggage within inter-city American airports?

It is basically where you enter USA first. Doesn't have to be Pittsburgh. Basically where you will get your immigration done first. This all depends on airlines and their partner airlines. Find a international airline which is partner with domestic airline who would collect bags directly at pittsburgh.

For example: ex: etihad + american airlines plus immigration us clearance done in abu dabhi
For example: When you take the flight at Mumbai, they directly check your luggage in to the first USA airport that you enter. There, you'll have customs. After that, you'll check in your luggage again. Don't worry, your 23*2 plus cabin luggage is standard. You'll still have to collect bags at port of entry for customs.

Is there a direct flight to Pittsburgh?

You will mostly not find flights to Pittsburgh. You'll have two stops. One outside US and one inside. Only United airlines, Delta Airlines and one or two other airlines offer London/Paris to Pitt direct.

What are the rates for the student ticket? Are they any cheaper?

In most cases, instead of reducing the price of the ticket, they may offer students to carry extra baggage over and above the prescribed limit.

Is the student offer only available at Emirates?

Emirates and Qatar offer it. Google may help you find good deals.

Any good forex card deals?

If y'all are looking for a forex card, I read about this firm called GoNiyo.

<https://www.goniyo.com/phone/global.html> They charge literally nothing for issuance transaction, recharge, or maintainance of the account. One downside that I know of is they use the VISA exchange rate which I hear is 40p to 50p higher. It is highly recommend you to do your research before choosing the forex card. Apparently GoNiyo has no charge for atm withdrawals. Citizen Bank offers free cash withdrawals on forex cards. Whoever has a centrum card, speak to your rep. Mostly withdrawal is free. They've changed to Yes Bank as their bank. Another thing with Forex card is that using them at any atm here will carry an extra charge of 2-3 \$ even for balance inquiry so keep it mind when you use the atm with the card

Do they accept cash at Walmart, and other grocery stores?

They do accept but Card is used everywhere here. So start getting used to it.

What is the maximum amount that we can carry in Cash from India?

3000\$. So it is better to carry in card.

Anything else regarding carrying large amount of cash?

if you enter the U.S. or depart from the U.S. with more than \$10,000 in cash (or its equivalent - in Euros or gold bars or some other readily spendable currency) you must report the fact of what you are importing or exporting to Customs and Border Protection (on a convenient form an officer will give you;

What are some good loan agencies that offer at decent interest rates?

Prodigy finance, HDFC Credila, SBI loans, and to name few offer good interest rates with little or no mortgage for the education loans that they offer

I am a PhD student and have full scholarship, will my VISA be rejected?

No. There are many other reasons for VISA to be rejected, this is generally not one of them. Only in cases when source of funding is unreliable is the F1 VISA generally rejected.

Do landlords allow people to stay for a month before signing an actual long term lease?

No. Maximum time offered for outsiders to stay at a flat for which they are not renting or have not signed the lease is 3-5 days, only if you know the outsiders know the people in the flat and the lease signed by the people in the flat has not ended.

What is the usual protocol for payment after signing the lease?

Most of the management companies and landlords accept a wire transaction. Most common protocol here is that on signing, you will pay the security deposit, the first month's rent and/or the last month's rent.

What are some life hacks that I need to know very well before coming to Pittsburgh?

Learning to cook. Learn as many recipes in India, so you can cook for yourself and spend for food outside less. Learning to cook will help you save a lot of money and also because getting Indian food here is quite costly(Dosa here is >7\$ at the best restaurants, about 500Rs. India which we would never pay !!)

When does my lease generally start?

Leases generally start on August 1st, last week of July or about 15th August.

How much deposit do I need to pay while signing the lease?

While signing a lease, most realtors will expect you to pay a deposit for the apartment, which could be anywhere from a \$100 to the first month's rent. This deposit will be returned when the term of lease expires and you leave the apartment.

I cannot land at Pittsburgh exactly when my lease starts, that is I will land a little earlier than when my lease starts, what should I do?

Quality Inn is in South Oakland and pretty close to the campus. If you need to stay in a hotel, this would be a good option. There are few airbnbs around Lawrenceville as well. The 93 bus takes you from there to the Campus.

How high can electricity bill go in winters and in spring/summer?

In winter, depending on whether your heating is gas or electricity it can vary. It will be typically be around 30-35\$ per person. In spring/summer, this price will go down, because you won't be needing heating at all.

How do I get to my house from the airport?

The Pittsburgh Port Authority bus 28X covers many major stops from the airport to Shadyside. The fare for the bus is \$2.75 and it requires you to feed in the exact amount. Any excess will not be returned. Other options are Uber, Lyft, Super shuttle, z-trip, to name a few. (Uber and Lyft require a card that's issued in the USA. No cash. Z-trip allows you to pay with both cash and card and accepts even forex)

will there be a shuttle service from airport to university during the orientation week?

Because probably most students reach there during that week.

We will let you know soon. Meanwhile you can take look at the other options listed in the FAQ.

What is the meaning of "Inbound" and "Outbound" that is for bus routes?

All "Inbound" buses go towards [Downtown](#) and all "Outbound" buses go away from Downtown. You will see this being used most frequently on the 61 and 71 buses, because both these buses connect the city along Forbes and Fifth avenue from and to Downtown.

How do I travel within Pittsburgh?

Port Authority buses are available across most locations in Pittsburgh. The fare is \$2.75 per trip in cash. Carrying change (\$2 bills and \$0.75 worth quarters) is beneficial. Port Authority also issues monthly, weekly and daily passes via a system called connect-card (in case any parents accompany the students and wish to travel). All public transport is **free** for pitt students with their ID card.

Where do I get my Pitt ID?

Your pitt ID will be available at Panther Central in the lobby of Litchfield Towers, Oakland.

Location: <https://goo.gl/maps/YGAukFLoSvLgJzMp7>

IE students should register for courses first and only then they will be able to go to panther central and get id cards.

How do I travel from the Airport to the University?

Print out the 28X Airport Flyer schedule. This will give you the schedule of the bus that shuttles between the University Campus and the Airport. Remember to get off at the Bigelow Blvd. bus stop. You will have to pay \$2.25 as soon as you enter the bus. Hence, remember to carry exact change. You can change dollar bills to quarters at machines at the airport. In case you land at

an hour when there is no bus for a very long time and you have someone waiting at the University, call for the Yellow Cab (412-321-8100).

What do I do for local transportation in Pittsburgh?

Buses: Public transport by way of buses is really good in Pittsburgh contrary to other cities in the U.S. Port authority is responsible for the public buses in Pitt. These are free with the Pitt ID Card. You will realize what a huge blessing this is once you travel to other cities where the public transport is not free. The website for the buses is: <http://www.ridegold.com/>

In addition you have the 'T'. It is an underground tram service that connects some parts of Pittsburgh. The schedules and fares for the same are available on the same website as the port authority buses. You can follow the link given above and download PDF documents of the required bus schedules. For the first week, until you get your Pitt ID, you can purchase a weekly pass from Giant Eagle which will allow you to avail any number of bus rides anywhere in Pittsburgh for the entire week.

Cabs: Taxis in Pittsburgh are "Call-cabs". You have to make a call to get a cab. The Yellow Cab and the People's Cab are popular Cabs.

The link for Yellow cab: http://www.pghtrans.com/yellow_cab.cfm

Phone number for Yellow Cab: 412 – 321 - 8100 Phone number for

People's Cab: 412 – 466 - 8300

What you need to do is to call the given number and request for a cab, give your current location and your destination. The operator will tell you how long you have to wait till the cab gets there. That's it.

IMPORTANT: Please remember to print out the 28X Airport Flyer schedule and make a note of the cab numbers when you arrive at the airport at Pittsburgh. This way, you have some idea of public transport in case there is no one to pick you up at the airport. You will have to pay \$2.25 as soon as you enter the bus. You will need to carry exact change.

How do I carry my luggage at the Airport?

You can get a trolley by inserting three one-dollar bills into the trolley machine at the baggage pickup in the Airport. [Trick: when you return the trolleys at the appropriate location at the airport, you get your 25 cents back]

What are the three most important things that I need to do when I land?

1. Get connected with the sim card
2. Visit the Panther Central to get your ID card to enjoy all the privileges such free bus travel, printouts from printing machine, etc on the card (printouts only after registering for courses)
3. Once your accommodation is set, If it is a working day, Pay a visit to the PNC bank at 4031 Fifth Ave, Pittsburgh, PA 15213 or Citizen Bank with your I-20, Visa, Passport, I-94 print out, lease document or address proof

What is the I94 record?

I94 serves as a record to/from the US soil over the past few years of the individual. This is no longer a paper document and can be accessed online.

<https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>

What questions should I ask a bank when creating an account?

The preference for students here is PNC as its pretty popular in the region, but you can create an account at any bank. Some of the questions to be asked are,

How do your saving and checking accounts work?

Do I need to maintain a minimum balance? If so, what is the minimum balance?

If I drop below my minimum balance, what is the fee?

Does the account have any monthly or annual fees? Is there any interest?

How long will it take for me to get my debit card? Are there any fees associated with the debit card?

What is the fee for a wire transfer? Is there a monthly limit for wire transfers?

What is the course structure?

Every program has its own unique course structure. You need to contact either your advisor or if you get in touch with seniors in the program, you can know how and what to apply for that semester that you're getting admitted in. Generally a student has to register for at least 9 credits to be considered full time students, otherwise for less than 9 credits they are considered to be doing part-time.

When is the orientation this year?

August 12th, 2019

When should I reach Pittsburgh?

Don't reach more than 2-3 days earlier than Orientation, you won't have much to do until then

What is the OIS check-in and when does it happen?

OIS check-in is done by the OIS on your I-20 to note that you have landed in US and are starting school on the set date as per the I-20 details. It happens during the orientation week.

What is the class start date?

https://registrar.pitt.edu/assets/pdf/Academic%20Calendar%202019-2020_Final.pdf

When can I start registering for courses?

You cannot start registering for courses until document verification is completed (especially for students in SCI). This typically happens during the week of the orientation. But the good news is that seats generally are available for registering even until the last date of payment for tuition fees (by 6th September 2019)

IE students should register for courses first and only then they will be able to go to panther central and get id cards.

Do we need to be a full-time student under F-1 Visa?

Yes. <https://www.ois.pitt.edu/f-1-students#maintain> we need to be registered from 9-15 credits to be considered full time students during the academic year (Spring and Fall semesters) and it is mandatory. The only time you are allowed to registered for less than 9 credits is in the summer or in the semester you will be graduating in, when you would have to only complete the total number of remaining credits as per your degree requirements.

I have a question. I have read online that we can audit courses from CMU . Can you give me more information on that ?

That's true..it will be considered as an elective course and you have to be registered as a full time student at Pitt when you take a CMU course..which means you need to take 9 credits with Pitt + cmu course. But you'll be paying Pitt fees NOT CMU fees. They have some council of university in Pennsylvania- 8 universities .you can take max one cmu course in a semester. And you don't have to pay anything extra. You can check all the details here

<https://www.registrar.pitt.edu/pche.html>

it is possible to take cmu courses... You won't have to pay extra cmu fees... It will be through the Pittsburgh council of higher Ed..

I won't have all my testimonials ready by the time of the document verification, as I am in my final semester right now and will not have all the originals in time before my classes start. what do I do?

Keep your transcripts ready for document verification. If you don't have the full transcript ready, keep all the originals and grade cards of all your semesters and the provisional degree certificates as well as other testimonials that you can present. The document verification committee is generally understanding regarding delays in the documentations from other institutions and keep the testimonials that you have in hand in their custody until the full transcripts arrive, to allow you to register for courses on time. Either way it is a good idea to present your case to the verification committee such that you're doing your best in retrieving the appropriate documents, so that they can aid you well.

By when should I take the English test?

It is ideal to take the english test any time in the week before the week when orientation starts. This gives you enough time to know the results of the test and for your advisor to clear hold before you are allowed to register for courses.

How much tax is deducted from stipend?

Generally about 20% of the income is deducted from the stipend, but this may vary on case by case basis.

How important is health insurance and where to start ?

It cannot be stressed enough that medical costs in the country are huge without insurance and at times even minor bruises/injuries could offset bills in the thousands of dollars. The requirement is usually to have a medical insurance set by the first 2 weeks of September.

<https://www.hr.pitt.edu/students/graduate-plan> The Pitt human resources suggests UPMC for full coverage , people with dental or vision needs should consider getting the insurance for those as well as it's better to be safe than sorry. There are cheaper options , but the insurance deductible will be higher and other tradeoffs to consider.

<https://www.isoa.org/> (option)

<https://www.psiservice.com/portal.do?visaType=ESL&stateId=State39&schoolId=School02525&dob=02/19/1994> (option 2)

There are others as well.

Also please note this statement from University

“As part of the enrollment process, international students will be required to attest to having other U.S. based medical insurance coverage or enroll through a University sponsored program.”

You can know more about this in the link below

<https://www.hr.pitt.edu/students/medical-coverage>

Can we use the same insurance for the second year if we didn't use it in our first year?

No. Insurance plans must be periodically renewed.

What is on campus employment and how do I go about searching for it?

As F1 students, during the semester students are allowed to work for a maximum of 20 hours a week on campus . This means that students can work in the library, IT department, reception and other related cogs of the university . During thanksgiving break as well as Christmas , students can usually work for 40 hours as needed. To search for employment , the university has created a job portal, <https://www.join.pitt.edu/> This is quite simple to use.

How do I apply for SSN?

A full time university student can only do 20 hours of Part Time **at an office that is on-campus**(on-campus means any office or department that is affiliated to the university) during the semester. You can apply to Part time jobs [here](#). Once you have such a job, you can apply for SSN, by first requesting on a e-form on myOIS. The OIS (7th Floor of William Pitt Union, just take elevator and you'll get there) will print a certification that you have an oncampus job. You have to take this form from OIS and your VISA/passports, I-94, fill [this](#) form and at this office Social Security Office Pittsburgh, 6117 station st, PA 15206.

Can I get a TA/RA position in my department?

Getting a teaching assistantship is based on rules and funding of your department or program. You must contact your department directly for this. Or else, personally contact any of the students in the Department Contact List of the pitt_grad_ankur Yahoo! Group.

I do not have a scholarship. Can I get an on-campus job?

Yes. You can work in the library, Campus Computing labs, etc. For an on-campus job work for 20 hours a week at \$6/ hr, after tax you get \$5/hr, one can earn upto ~ \$400 per month.

I have an on-campus job. Can I get another on-campus job?

No.

Can we watch Bollywood, Tamil, Telugu movies? At what prices?

Yes. Several theatres here screen Indian movies here. The ticket prices are variable keep a budget of at least 20\$ for movies.

Can I just download and watch movies?

No. A Big No. Piracy is taken very strictly here, so downloading content on torrents and other means is illegal and shouldn't be done.

What items are advisable to bring from India?

1. Medicine- Bring basic medicine for fever, bodyache, cough, cold, diarrhea, acidity, bandaids, cotton, vitamin B etc and prescriptions are recommended for medicine being carried.
2. Cooking utensils and Powders- Bringing basic utensils as well as the indian curry powders is advisable, preferably in packets as they can be expensive here.
3. Safety pins, sewing kit and screwdrivers
4. Extra pair of glasses/lens
5. Travel Adapters (India to US)

Preferably get your winter wear once you arrive as there are good options here in Pittsburgh for purchase. Pittsburgh gets really cold in the winter and keeping stock of winter wear before arrival is helpful.

Regarding medications..most OTC drugs like paracetamol, Ibuprofen, vitamin tablets etc can be bought in pharmacy without prescription right? do all drugs require a prescription?

you get a few strips of normal cold and flu stuff from India. Others you can get here

Is there a travel checklist that I could refer to before travelling?

<https://www.happyschools.com/list-of-things-to-carry-to-us-students/>

Where can I get Indian groceries close to campus?

Bombay (Indian) Food Market 4605 Centre Ave

How much money should I bring?

It's advisable not to carry large amounts of cash and instead transfer money once you setup an account. It is in your discretion as to how much you can afford to carry in cash.

The main bank in Pittsburgh is PNC, for student accounts. Because you get wire transfers to other PNC accounts free of cost. That way you can pay your fee by wire without tax.

Using a foreign exchange card for a small amount of money is more advisable. PNC doesn't accept forex.. So you've to withdraw cash and deposit in your pnc account.

There are some apps that you can use to transfer money such as [TransferWise](#)

In some cases, the loan agencies such as HDFC Credila and Yes banks provide with a travel card such as Centrum, that you can use for immediate withdrawals from ATMs here. Please note that there is a charging fee of about 2-3 dollars for every transaction(including checking balance) which varies from bank to bank.

What would be an appropriate amount of money to carry with me from India?

Arrival Expenses Analysis:

\$350 - deposit for apartment Per month

\$350 – apartment rent

\$100 - groceries

\$100 - eating outside

\$100 Tel bill + Calling cards to India + misc

Total per month = \$650.

For two months = \$1300.

Other initial miscellaneous expenses for setting up the apartment ~ \$150

Total that you should get to be on the safer side = \$1800 for the first two months (i.e. before you get your first pay check). Please bring lots of change in terms of “one-dollar bills”. In case you are taking the 28X Airport Flyer bus from the Airport, you will have to pay \$2.25 to get to the University of Pittsburgh.

Note: If you are a fully funded PhD student, Pitt does not pay you until the end of the month (end of September, if you're starting in mid-August).

How do we pay at restaurants and clubs?

Paying by cash is advisable at restaurants and clubs as they charge extra fee on using a card to pay.

How do I get around campus and recognize the correct buildings?

Pitt has an excellent map service , with detailed markings for important landmarks.

<https://www.map.pitt.edu/>

I have a connecting flight, What should I be aware of ?

Make sure that layover is at least 2 hours to be safe and avoid the hassles of being in a hurry . Further ,be attentive to baggage and announcements over the speakers.

What are the monthly living expenses on average ?

- Rent : 350-500 USD per month
- Groceries : 100-150 USD per month
- Electricity and Water Bills - 30-50 USD per month
- Phone Bill - 30-50 USD per month

- Internet Bill - 30-50 USD per month(shared)
- Food and Miscellaneous: Depends on individual (assume 100 USD)
- Hair cuts/salon (for men) - about 14\$ is reasonable

How will on-campus jobs benefit us with living expenses?

On-campus jobs are generally good enough for paying off your rent.

What is the frequency of the buses in Pitt?

On weekdays the frequency is about every 10-15 minutes. On Sundays is usually half hour to an hour for some buses(for example 93/58) .

Some apps that are useful as soon as you land?

- Venmo (by PayPal) for instant money transfer
- Zelle (by PNC bank)
- PNC bank app (it includes Zelle now)
- Uber (it is a different app than one in India) and Lyft for travel.
- Splitwise (for keep track of your share of money to pay back or get returns)

How long will it take to get i20 after document upload?

After the i20 has been created, you'd have to pay online and you would receive it within 3-4 business days after it has been shipped.

Can you get your SEVIS number even before you get your i20?

Yes. You will receive your SEVIS information by email so you can book your visa appointment. You'll can also take an emergency visa appointment if the i20 arrives late.

On the I-20 what address am I supposed to give here? My Indian address?

Yes.

In VISA application what should be the duration of stay for MS?

It'll be as per your I-20. 2 years.

A general sidenote: your i-20 is the most important document after passport/ visa etc it gets updated when you apply for CPT as a new copy you need to keep every copy of I-20 you get forever

Can we give the address and details of my family friend in DS 160, who can give financial support ?

No. Give your own address while filing the form.

Which mobile number/sim should I use?

Initially, you guys can use the mint Sim or some other sim for one month (since the bank will require you to have a number to make an account).

Once you guys decide about your roommates and make some friends, you can get a family plan with a single service provider which will reduce your phone bill as compared to an individual plan.

The service provider you choose will also be able to port your number to their Sim very easily. So don't worry about changing your number after one month.

What is Church sale?

[Church on the fifth avenue](#) has giveaways where they give a lot of stuff for free. You guys should take advantage of it. If it's there. There are stuff like home furnishings, crockery, lamps, bed sets, Sofa, Table, Study table, Chairs, Blending machines, Lamps.

Is it every month?

Nope only one time. Once a year. For new students. 1 large item and as many small items you can carry and until stocks last. We even took 2 large items. (2 set of table chair set in my case) They have so much and you can take more with request.

so it would be around August only, right?

Yes

By when do I have to pay fees?

<https://payments.pitt.edu/due-date-schedule/>

Can I apply for VISA without having my I-20 yet received?

Yes. In some cases the university gives the relevant details to apply for the visa when you don't have the i-20.

I want to know any formalities with University before we start. Acceptance confirmation already given to university. Any other fields to update with University / department . Applied for visa waiting for approval. Please guide me.

Once you receive your I-20, you will have to login to [myOIS](#) and start your onboarding process.

What are the steps involved in OIS onboarding?

After receiving your i-20 you will be given a Pitt id and a password and you will need to login to [OIS](#) and get started with the onboarding process. Click the "Limited Services" hyperlink on the right side box. The onboarding process in OIS is broken into several steps, as links in the left hand side box of the page that appears after you login. All the steps have to be completed before the start of the orientation. Once done, you will complete the OIS onboarding with the OIS check-in that happens during the Orientation week.

I couldn't avail the 3 package facility for student travellers that airlines offer, is there a way I could package from India?

Those who don't get third bag, can check out [Garudavega](#) couriers. They are reasonably cheaper than other courier services.

I recently got an admit in U Pitt. What would be the next step?

Accept it. You'll receive a mail from Office of International Services (OIS) with details on logging in to myOIS portal. They'll issue an i20 in about a week after you upload your financial documents on the portal.

Get your i20 and book your visa appointment asap. And please refer the FAQs and reach out to ANKUR if you have any further questions.

What vaccines should I take and is there a link which I could refer to for this?

<https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/forms/immunization-forms/>

<https://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/forms/>

<http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/shs/immunization/university-requirements/>

Do I need to take high risk vaccines as well along with those in the list?

Just get the required vaccines done as in the link above.

And we have to mail the proof of vaccines to the university right?

Yes. Scan and send the document proof to the email in that link.

In this vaccination form, do I need to fill in my India address or my US address?

Put your Indian address.

For financial support document, is it mandatory to have attested document from parents?

Yes. A sample doc of this kind can be found [here](#).

If we have taken loan and have some savings in bank, we can upload sanction letter and bank statement right?

Yes, that works to be a financial support. Keeping enough proofs of Mutual Funds, Fixed Deposits and Bank statements are helpful too.

If I have money my account, do I need to have affidavit for that also ?

You would need to create a bank statement (which is not an affidavit) and have that bank statement attested by the branch manager.

What are the financial documents necessary for the visa process?

1. Have a correct list of people fee support document and daily expenses in order.
2. Have them sign the document as they would be financing you as what is their relation to you and how much they would be paying.
3. Be sure to show all the finances in liquid cash (funds that are available as when you need them).
4. Submit the bank balance statements for 1 financial year duly attested by the bank manager.

5. Have the IT returns of the supporting people ready too as a safe side.
6. There should be enough funds for the people supporting you for their personal use as well.
7. If you are opting for educational loan please have the loan approval copy too along with the other documents.

The amount to be added in funding source can be in indian currency or it has to be in USD?

On the OIS, you can enter it in INR . They'll do the conversion to USD

How did you provide the breakdown of expenses to procure a bank loan?

Show them your i-20, it has the breakdown of expenses you require.

Where do I get calling cards to call back home?

The Office of International Services may give you a complimentary calling card worth \$10 when you register. But you should get yourself registered on Reliance India - that's the cheapest. You could also use Skype if your family or friends in India have a high speed internet connection.

Where can I get Internet access immediately?

The Hillman library will allow you to use the Internet facilities as long as you have a username and password, which you should have ideally received from the university by now. If not you will get as soon as you report to the OIS. You can even get it from one of the guys in the computer labs. You would already be in the system by the time you get here. It would be just that they might not have emailed the details about your account to you. In addition, you should be able to use the internet kiosks in William Pitt Union, Litchfield Towers, Benedum Hall.

If you have your own laptop, then you can access the wireless internet which is available at some selected locations on campus. Please follow the link for details about wireless networking on campus and computing labs.

<http://wireless.pitt.edu/>

Also, Schenley Plaza, the Downtown area, cafes like Caribou, Starbucks or Panera Bread, also have free Wifi.

What about internet access at home?

For permanent Internet access at home it will be a slightly long procedure. The options you have are:

. Apply for a landline phone from Verizon. (Cheapest plan will cost you around \$22 a month including taxes). Once you get that working you can use your landline phone service to connect to the university internet system using your Pitt username and password. However, the transfer speed is slow (5-10 kbps). An added bonus: if you have a landline then you can call all local numbers (area code 412-xxx-xxxx) for free anytime.

0. You can apply for a Verizon DSL connection. You will need a Verizon landline phone for that. The total cost of the plan will be (cheapest) approx \$39 / month. The speed will

then be pretty good (around 100 kbps). They will also provide you with a router with which you can have wireless internet connection at home.

0. Cable Internet from COMCAST. The cheapest plan is \$23 (including taxes). You will get some basic cable (8-9 channels) and wireless internet at home. The speed will be pretty good too. Comcast Digital Cable and Internet is in fact most popular and commonly used in Pittsburgh. We recommend this.

0. Often, you can catch someone else's wireless unsecured network that you might get access to in your house...it's free!

How do I go about getting my bank account?

For a bank account, you will need your passport, a driving license if you have one already, and your I-20. Essentially, you need two forms of identification.

How do I get a cell phone?

Now this is a slightly complicated matter. The rules of most cellular phone companies here stipulate that you need credit history for getting a phone. To build a credit history, you need a credit card. But, without a social security number and without any financial record, you cannot get a card. So what do you do?

Two options exist. Most people have someone they know in the United States, so they use this benefactor's credit history to get a phone, usually a sibling, cousin or relatives or close friends. The phone is then registered in the 'benefactor's' name.

The other option for those who do not know anyone here is to pay a returnable deposit to the wireless company and get a phone. The deposit rates vary for different wireless service providers, they can be quite hefty from 200\$ to 500\$ depending upon the service providers. The popular ones are Cingular, Verizon, T-Mobile and Sprint. Also available are Cricket phones (has nothing to do with the game cricket) which work like the prepaid cell phones in India. They have their merits and demerits. The best way to select a service provider is by looking for the most popular one among your family or friends in the US. The reason is that, it is free anytime for subscribers within a particular network.

Cingular has a product called the 'GoFone' which is also similar to the prepaid system in India. It would be best for you to take a look at all schemes before deciding on one. Also, it is usually better to buy a phone online than in the store. Better deals are available online. Most of the current deals will be made available to you by the companies themselves sometime during your International Orientation week.

Where can I eat?

You can eat out at a variety of places. For those on a tight budget but looking for a satisfying meal, look at the 'Indian cart' on the Bigelow boulevard street. It has awesome food and chaat too, at very reasonable rates (\$3-4). There are health and hygiene checks on the place regularly. There is also a Thai or Chinese Cart alongside, that are pretty good too. In addition, Panera Bread on Forbes Avenue in Oakland has good sandwiches and soups (3-7\$). Then you have Veracruz (\$3-5) and Qdoba (\$5-7) on Forbes for Mexican food.

There are a variety of Indian restaurants that offer lunch buffets and dinner buffets for anywhere between 8\$-10\$. Popular Middle eastern cuisine is available at two places - Ali Baba on South Craig's street and Aladdin on Forbes and Murray Avenue in Squirrel Hill. Chinese food is available at quite a few places on Forbes Avenue in Oakland. Lulu's on South Craig Street is famous for Thai food. Apart from these, there are a lot of places to eat (and drink) on Walnut Street in Shadyside and Murray Avenue in Squirrel Hill.

South Indian food is available at Tamarind and Udupi. Both of these are not easily accessible by public transport. The latter is located very close to the famous SV temple. Do make it a point to go there when visiting the temple. Again, a list of places near Oakland which serve good food for reasonable rates will be made available to you at the Orientation.

What about Entertainment and Sports?

You have a variety to pick from. Multiplexes in Waterfront, Southside and Waterworks and theater in Squirrel Hill make movie watching both easy and accessible. Student discounts are available at a variety of places. Be sure to ask before paying. In addition, you have Schenley Park which has 8 tennis courts at least. Trees Hall has a swimming pool for students. Peterson's events center has a massive gym (only for students), with awesome amenities. William Pitt Basement has pool, table tennis and consoles for video games. Rock Climbing is an activity also available at the Trees hall. Most of the sporting facilities are either free or available for a nominal fee.

In addition, Pitt has a really good biking team and also a cricket team. They play cricket every Saturday on the lawns of Cathedral of Learning on almost every Saturday (weather permitting). They also have season ball matches from time to time. :)

Book lovers, Carnegie Public Library is a must see and the library card is a must have. You can borrow books, DVDs, music CDs and what have you. It's all free!!!! :) In addition, the library organizes a variety of activities every month - from concerts to movie screenings to book readings.

Are black friday sales popular in Pittsburgh?

People usually go to Best Buy and clothing stores. Not many stores in the city.. You've to go a bit away

Black Fridays are getting more popular for online sales . Also lot of websites to keep track of deals like slickdeals or there's a subreddit for black Friday as well . That's far away though

What are the places I can visit in Pittsburgh?

Mount Washington, a must see. It is beautiful, especially at night. You can get there by driving in your vehicle or take the 'T' or a bus up to Station Square and then just take the Incline. Yes, I said the Incline. It's a tram that climbs up the incline of a mountain slowly and from the top you can see the most interesting view of Pittsburgh. You can see the river and the stadiums- Heinz Hall and PNC Park and the Golden Triangle. You can take one of the two inclines- Duquesne Incline or the Monongahela Incline. Both offer a spectacular view. Next on the list is the Golden

Triangle. The Golden Triangle refers to the confluence of the three rivers that meet at Pittsburgh. It's a beautiful view and you can see the best parts of Pittsburgh's downtown on your way there.

Then of course, we have some very colorful neighborhoods in Pittsburgh, for one, Strip District, and no, it's not what the name sounds like. Strip District is a quaint old place that offers a glimpse into the eclectic communities residing in Pittsburgh. One can find all kinds of European foods there. A weekly market on Saturday brings out the best in the city there. The best foods, the best bargains in the flea market and whatever else you can think of and those you cannot can be found in the main shopping districts. Whether it is the antique furniture store or the cheap handbags or the mouth watering fudge at the corner or the varieties of cheese, this place truly is diverse. Then we have Schenley Park and the Phipps Conservatory which is a greenhouse with some really rare and beautiful plants as well as butterflies. There's also the Pittsburgh Zoo and the Carnegie Museums. Bars, pubs and clubs are aplenty. All in all, you do not have to look very far for quality entertainment. You never run out of options for fun in Pittsburgh.

What is a good time to shop for clothes in US?

It is always good to buy stuff off season. That is if you are buying boots and sweater for winter, you should buy it during Fall or winter end, when they will be very cheap similarly summer clothes you should buy during labour day weekend(the first holiday when you join in Fall semester) and you'll get summer clothes and stuff really cheap

Some locations to keep in mind:

- Burlington (downtown Pittsburgh)
- Ross Park Mall (you first take a bus to downtown then take 12. The last stop of 12 bus is Ross Park Mall)

These are must go places for economical people.

How is the winter in Pittsburgh?

Winters here are considered pretty harsh, even by American standards. Temperatures drop to -20 to -30 C. Buying winter clothes is a huge expedition by itself. Make sure you visit shops like Burlington Coat Factory, J.C. Penney, Land's End etc. well in advance (there are massive Labor Day sales sometime in mid September, where you ought to be able to get snow boots or winter shoes at bargain prices). Shopping online at any of these shops works too, as long as you know your size.

You will need to buy shoes, cotton socks (NOT wool, whatever anyone might tell you. Wool socks don't absorb sweat as well, thus freezing your toes even more), mufflers, gloves (leather gloves worn on top of woolen ones ensures you can play in the snow without numbing your fingers), caps/hoods, thermal underwear and so on. Lots of people will tell you that you don't really need special shoes and scarves and all that, but hey, if you're coming from a part of India that knows only summer, trust us - you do NOT want to be taken unaware by this kind of weather. But never fear. There's plenty of time, and plenty of shops.

Where can I go for adventure sports in Pittsburgh?

During winter, a good place for skiing is the Seven Springs Mountain Resort, which is just two hours from Pittsburgh. During summer, you can go to White Water Adventures for white water rafting, fishing, biking and hiking at Ohiopyle, which is just an hour and a half from Pittsburgh.

Which airline should i choose?

The choice doesn't really matter. Ideally choose cheapest option you get. Mostly you get 2 bags allowance, look for student offer for 3 bags.

Mostly, you would have to collect yours bags at port of entry for customs and recheck-in. That all depends, If you book a flight with airlines who has domestic partner airline, you would collect bags directly at destination. (always cross check with your airlines).

One more think you can look for is USA preclearance done at some places like Abu Dhabi if that's your connecting airport.

One such example is etihad+american airline.

Check out multiple sites to compare prices and try to find discount coupons on sites like grabon.

There is a layover of my flight at Dubai for 9 hours. Should I take a transit VISA?

It depends on the country of layover. Please go through details of the country before taking such a flight.