

# **FAQ(FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS)**

## **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, Mozart management, Union Real Estate, McQuarter's realty co etc. (they have their own websites). Pitt also has an off campus housing search website called OCL.

### **Links:**

[https://www.facebook.com/groups/816037598451517/?ref=group\\_header](https://www.facebook.com/groups/816037598451517/?ref=group_header)  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HousingAndRoommatesInPittsburgh/>  
<https://www.ocl.pitt.edu/exploring-campus-living>

## **What are some important questions to ask landlords?**

1. Are utilities included in the rent? What utilities will I be paying for separately?
2. Is laundry 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?

## **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.

## **When does my lease generally start?**

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

## **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 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)

### **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>

### **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 it's 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](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)

**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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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. Using a foreign exchange card for a small amount of money is more advisable.

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 banks provide with a travel card, 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.

### **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

### **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)