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Insider's Guide to College Tours

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Here's the truth about college tours: they're not just about checking boxes on your teenager's list. They're about that moment when your kid walks onto a campus and suddenly you can

picture them there—backpack slung over their shoulder, debating philosophy over dining hall pizza, and maybe even calling you less often than you'd like.

In California, expect sunshine, school spirit, and standout campuses like USC, UCLA, Stanford, and UC Berkeley. The Midwest brings a classic collegiate vibe with big-name schools like Michigan, Ohio State, and Carnegie Mellon. Texas offers a blend of tradition and innovation at places like UT Austin, Rice, and Texas A&M. In the DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia), historic campuses like Georgetown and UMD give students easy access to DC. And for that classic New England feel, Massachusetts is home to Harvard, MIT, Amherst, and Mount Holyoke.

One rushed weekend won't cut it. You'll want to see campuses during different seasons, catch a football game, sit in on a lecture, maybe even return for an admitted students day. It's an investment in time that pays off when decision letters arrive. Read on to learn how to plan a smooth and inspiring college tour, with where to stay and what to do.

Need to know



Image courtesy of Downtown Los Angeles Proper Hotel, a Member of Design Hotels

College tours are all about seeing college campuses, as well as getting a feel for the lifestyle, energy, and community that comes with each one. Give yourself plenty of time between visits to explore surrounding neighborhoods. Try local spots and picture what daily life could look like there. Tours often run rain or shine, so prep for weather, walking, and lots of questions.

Transportation: The most convenient way to tour multiple colleges is by renting a car. You'll have more flexibility with timing, and it's often the only way to visit smaller towns. In big cities like Boston, San Francisco, or Chicago, public transit can be efficient and cost-effective, especially for urban campuses with limited parking.

Best time to visit: While each college campus has their own rhythm, the time of year you visit can make a difference. Spring (March-May) offers a glimpse of daily student life, but skip spring break. Fall (September-November) is peak "college town" season with football games and students settling in. Summer (June-August) is easier to plan with high school schedules, but you'll miss the campus feel. In winter (December-February), avoid breaks if you want to catch campus life in motion.

Ideal length of stay: College touring trips can be short weekend visits or multi-campus itineraries. A three- to five-day trip is often ideal to visit two to four schools and explore the surrounding area without feeling rushed.

What to wear: Check typical seasonal weather for the region. East Coast fall foliage means layers, while Midwest spring can still be chilly. Comfortable walking shoes are a must.

Travel tips:

- **Explore the area:** walk outside of the campus and check out the town. Turn it into a scavenger hunt by finding a student hangout, landmark, or a favorite off-campus spot.
- **Tour by major:** prospective engineers should peek into labs, while drama majors might want to check out the theaters.
- **Take two tours:** make sure to tour before applying to help narrow your list. Visit again after acceptance to choose where you'll thrive.
- **Build a smart route:** if you're tackling multiple campuses, lean on college counselors, advisors, and admissions offices to help shape your schedule.
- **Advance bookings:** college tours often fill up fast and may also limit the number of guests per student.

- **Come with a plan:** have the student jot down their top three priorities to guide their visit, like academics, cost, social life, location, etc.
- **Check the fine print:** some visit packages include perks like airport transfers, excursions, or wellness add-ons.

The West Coast

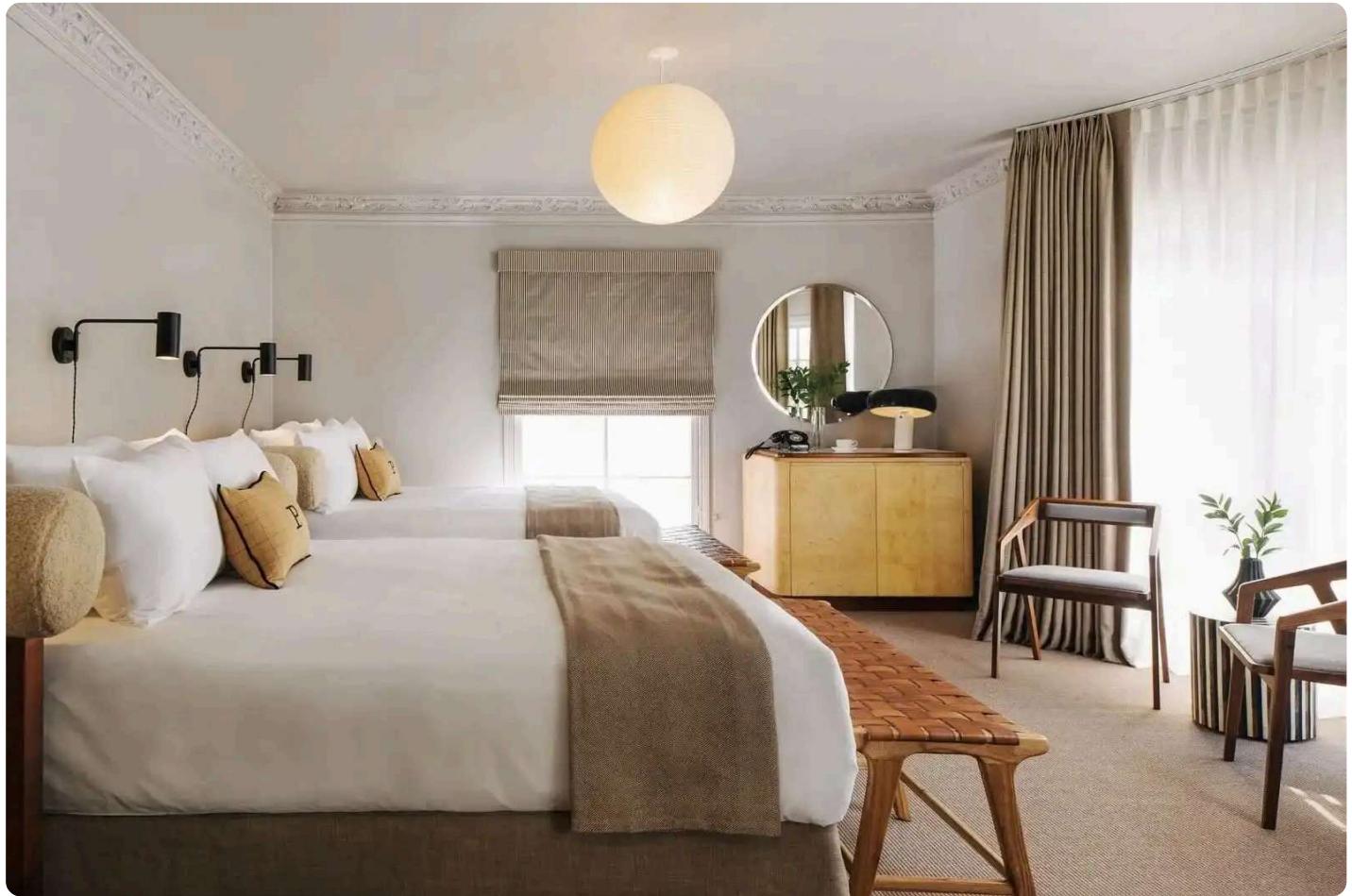


Image courtesy of Palihotel Westwood Village – West Beverly Hills

California pairs academics with lifestyle, from beachside campuses to innovation hubs. In Los Angeles, tour big schools like UCLA and USC, or smaller liberal arts colleges like Pomona College, and end with tacos by the ocean. Head north for Stanford or UC Berkeley, top-ranked schools at the heart of the Bay Area's tech and culture scene.

For a full West Coast circuit, visit Eugene for the University of Oregon and Seattle for the University of Washington. Both offer strong academics in walkable, outdoorsy cities.

Where to stay in Los Angeles

Downtown Los Angeles Proper Hotel, a Member of Design Hotels: This design-forward hotel in Downtown LA is housed in a reimagined 1920s landmark building. Blending vintage charm with upscale amenities like a rooftop pool, artful interiors, and a central location.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Palihotel Westwood Village – West Beverly Hills: This boutique hotel offers cozy, stylish accommodations just a short walk from UCLA and Westwood's shops and eateries. It's a relaxed yet polished home base for visiting West LA and Beverly Hills right next door.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Shay Hotel: Modern, airy, and walkable to buzzy Culver City restaurants and studios, The Shay brings contemporary comfort and rooftop vibes. It's great for families wanting to explore the creative Westside, with easy access to the 10 freeway to get around.

- **Fora's Hyatt Privé partner perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Where to stay in the San Francisco Bay Area

1 Hotel San Francisco: This waterfront eco-luxury hotel offers serene interiors, a spa, and unbeatable views of the Bay. Just steps from the Ferry Building, it's a smart pick for a sustainably-minded stay close to Embarcadero and downtown schools.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food and beverage or spa credit, and a \$60 breakfast credit.

Palihotel San Francisco: Eclectic and intimate, this stylish boutique property in Union Square offers a lively yet relaxed urban vibe. Ideal for those looking to explore the heart of the city while staying somewhere with character.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include 10% off BAR, a welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Four Seasons Hotel Silicon Valley at East Palo Alto: A polished stay near Stanford, this modern escape has poolside cabanas, standout dining, and a calm, well-run vibe. It's just a short drive from campus and the surrounding tech corridor.

- When you book Four Seasons with Fora, you'll enjoy exclusive Four Seasons Preferred Partner benefits.

Where to stay in Berkeley

Claremont Resort & Club: Set in the Berkeley Hills with sweeping Bay views, all within a quick drive or Uber to campus. This iconic property blends historic charm with resort perks like a full-service spa, tennis, and sweeping Bay views.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast credit, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Graduate by Hilton Berkeley: Just one block from UC Berkeley, this collegiate-themed hotel is full of quirky charm and nostalgia. With communal spaces and a youthful vibe, it's ideal for families wanting a fun, walkable stay.

The Midwest

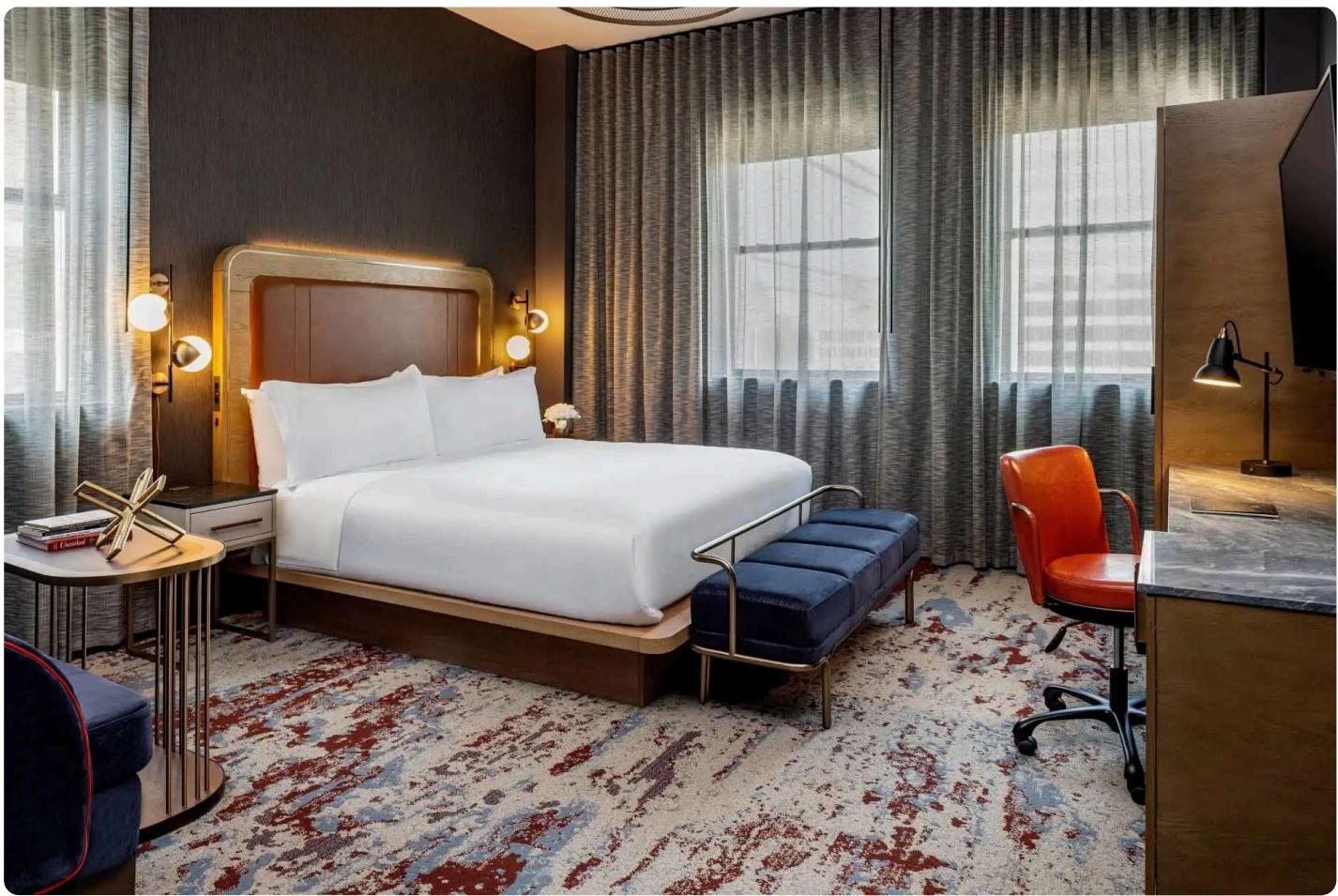


Image courtesy of The Industrialist Hotel, Pittsburgh, Autograph Collection

The Midwest serves up strong academics with plenty of personality. In Michigan, Ann Arbor is home to the spirited University of Michigan and its lively downtown, while East Lansing's Michigan State offers a vast green campus and classic college-town feel. Ohio State anchors Columbus with big-school pride, but smaller gems like Oberlin and Kenyon provide a quieter, liberal arts alternative. In Pennsylvania, you'll find Carnegie Mellon in tech-forward Pittsburgh, along with the University of Pittsburgh, and Penn State in State College where football weekends and college-town charm go hand in hand.

Where to stay in Michigan

Weber's Hotel & Restaurant (Ann Arbor): A local mainstay with retro charm, an indoor pool, and classic steakhouse fare. Weber's is a comfortable, family-friendly spot close to U of M, great for a restful stay after a full day on campus.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$25 food and beverage credit, an upgrade whenever possible, and guaranteed extended check-in/out.

Graduate by Hilton East Lansing: Just off MSU's campus, this playful hotel nods to Spartan pride with spirited design and walkable access to Grand River Avenue's shops and eats. It's both fun and functional for a campus-focused trip.

Shinola Hotel (Detroit): For those touring Wayne State or wanting a base in Detroit, this downtown standout mixes sleek design with plenty of comfort. Expect stylish rooms, strong coffee, and a central location that's ideal for winding down.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast credit, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Where to stay in Ohio

Le Méridien Columbus, The Joseph: In the heart of the Short North, this sleek, art-filled hotel is steps from buzzy galleries, shops, and restaurants. Ohio State's campus is just a short drive away, making it easy to balance touring with exploring.

- **Fora's Marriott LUMINOUS** partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Hotel LeVeque, Autograph Collection: With celestial-themed interiors and skyline views, this polished downtown stay brings a sense of calm and style. It's a great pick if you're craving a quieter base near Ohio State.

- **Fora's Marriott LUMINOUS** partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Graduate by Hilton Columbus: With bold vibes, Buckeye touches, and a prime spot in the Short North, this playful stay makes a fun home base near Ohio State. It's walkable, full of character, and hits the sweet spot between school spirit and city style.

Where to stay in Western Pennsylvania

Fairmont Pittsburgh: A polished stay in the city's cultural district, the Fairmont blends skyline views with refined comfort. Easy access to Carnegie Mellon and University of Pittsburgh, it's great for families who want walkability, museums, and a touch of luxury.

- **Fora's Accor Preferred** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Industrialist Hotel, Pittsburgh, Autograph Collection: Set in a historic building downtown, this stylish boutique hotel features sleek, modern interiors. Just a short drive to campuses, it's ideal for parents who want a little urban edge between tours.

- **Fora's Marriott LUMINOUS** partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Nittany Lion Inn (State College): A Penn State classic, this ivy-covered inn is all about tradition, charm, and prime access. It's beloved by generations of alumni for good reason, and you can't beat the location right on campus.

Graduate by Hilton State College: Steps from Penn State, this fun, collegiate-inspired hotel channels school pride with clever design details and cozy rooms. Perfect if you want to stay close to the action on College Ave.

Southern stops

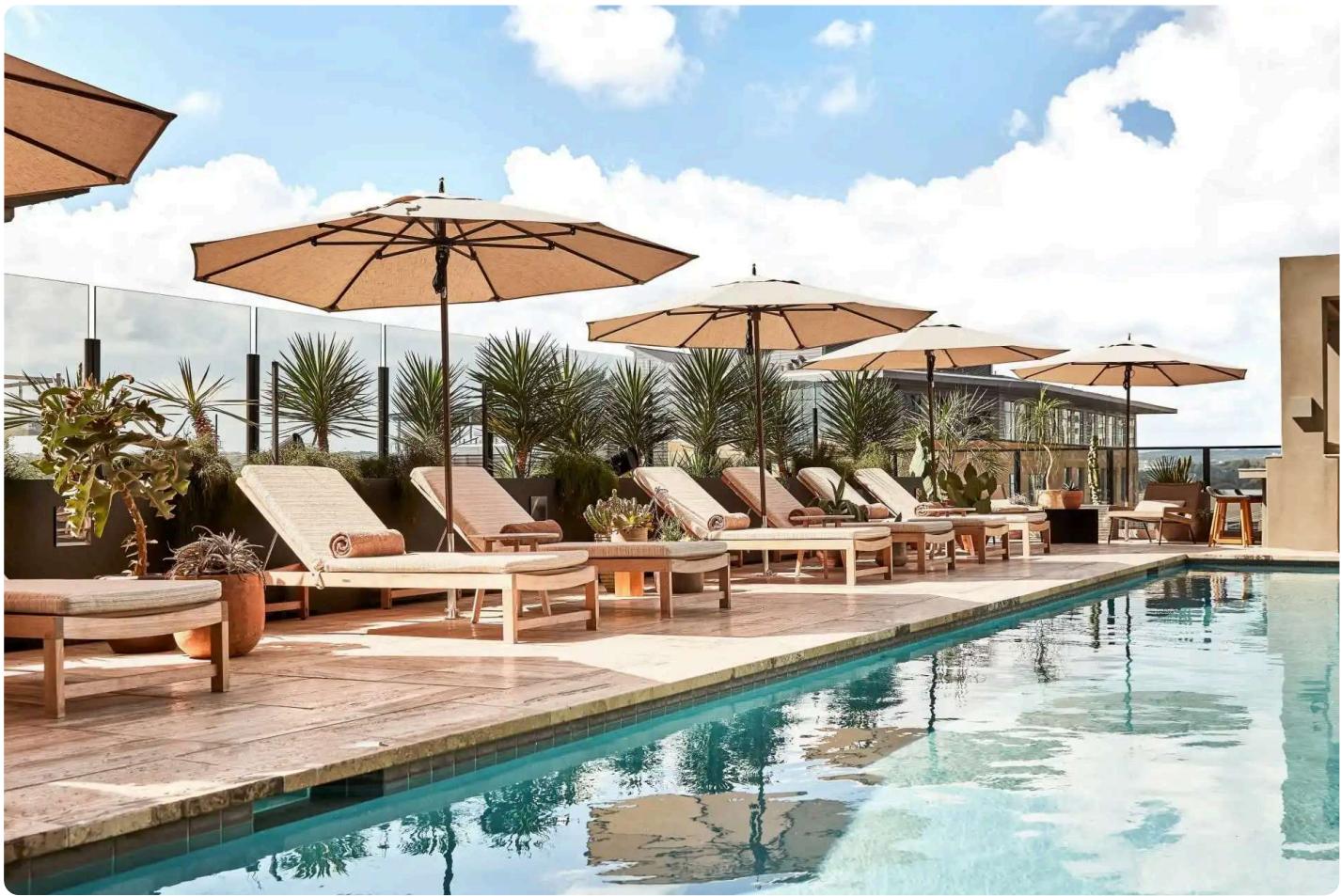


Image courtesy of Austin Proper Hotel, a Member of Design Hotels

Texas is best tackled as a triangle, from Austin to Dallas and Houston. Each is home to standout schools and distinct vibes. In Austin, UT has top-tier academics and a cool music and food scene. Head north to Dallas for Southern Methodist University or Texas Christian University. Houston rounds it out with Rice University, known for its strong programs and walkable campus near museums and parks. Along the way, don't miss Baylor in Waco or Texas A&M in College Station for more options between the major cities.

Where to stay in Dallas

Virgin Hotels Dallas: Just outside downtown in the Design District, this bold, modern hotel is known for its youthful energy, rooftop pool, and skyline views. A fun pick for parents or students who want a little scene with their stay.

- **For a Perk** include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Fairmont Dallas: A classic downtown choice with spacious rooms, a rooftop pool, and centrally located in the Arts District. Ideal for travelers who prefer timeless comfort with easy access to SMU and downtown.

- **Fora's Accor Preferred** partner perks include a \$100 property credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek: Tucked away in a quiet, upscale residential area, this historic mansion-turned-hotel blends Southern charm with five-star polish. Ideal for a more relaxed retreat after a full day of touring.

- **Fora's Rosewood Elite** partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Where to stay in Austin

Austin Proper Hotel, a Member of Design Hotels: Stylish and centrally located in the 2nd Street District, this hotel blends bold design with serious comfort. It's a go-to for parents wanting a chic stay near UT Austin and the buzzy Seaholm District.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The LINE Austin: Overlooking Lady Bird Lake, this retro-cool hotel blends mid-century bones with a modern edge. Floor-to-ceiling views and a lakeside pool, it's walkable to campus and perfect for those who want to plug into Austin's creative energy.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$50 hotel credit and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

ARRIVE Austin: Set on East 6th, ARRIVE brings boutique personality and a hyper-local vibe with its minimalist rooms, on-site coffee shop, and neighborhood feel. Great for parents or students who want to explore a less touristy side of the city between campus visits.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include 10% off BAR, a welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Where to stay in Houston

JW Marriott Houston by the Galleria: A reliable favorite with spacious rooms, a great pool, and easy access to Rice University and the Museum District. Excellent for families who want convenience and comfort.

- **Fora's Marriott LUMINOUS** partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Four Seasons Hotel Houston: Sleek and downtown-adjacent, this polished property offers top-notch service, a resort-style pool, and a relaxed luxury feel. It's a refined, easygoing spot for recharging between campus tours.

- When you book Four Seasons with Fora, you'll enjoy exclusive Four Seasons Preferred Partner benefits.

Thompson Houston, by Hyatt: One of the city's newest luxury additions, this modern hotel sits in the heart of the action with sweeping skyline views and a buzzy rooftop bar. A standout option if you're looking to mix touring with a little city fun.

- **Fora's Hyatt Privé** partner perks include a property credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia)



Image courtesy of Rosewood Washington, D.C.

The DMV region (Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia) packs a lot of standout schools into a small, easily drivable area. Start in Washington, DC, with Georgetown, George Washington University, and American University, then head to the University of Maryland just outside the city. From there, loop through Virginia for UVA, Virginia Tech, and the University of Richmond, each with distinct campus vibes and strong academics.

If you're also eyeing schools in North Carolina, it's a quick hop to visit Duke, UNC Chapel Hill, and NC State. They're great additions for students considering a wider geographic range.

Where to stay in Washington, DC

The LINE Hotel DC: A favorite among creatives and cool parents alike, this converted 110-year-old church in Adams Morgan blends eclectic charm with city energy. It's a fun, design-forward pick that still offers plenty of creature comforts for downtime between tours.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$50 food and beverage credit, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Rosewood Washington, D.C.: Located along the historic C&O Canal in Georgetown, this boutique hotel feels more like a private townhouse. It's ideal for a peaceful, elegant retreat after a packed tour day, and just walking distance from Georgetown's best shops and dining.

- Fora's Rosewood Elite partner perks include a welcome amenity, daily breakfast, and an upgrade.

Fairmont Washington, D.C., Georgetown: Classic and polished with a fantastic indoor pool and one of the most welcoming lobbies in town. This is a crowd-pleaser for families who want a familiar luxury experience in a great location close to Foggy Bottom and Georgetown.

- Fora's Accor Preferred partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

New England



Image courtesy of The Newbury Boston

In addition to its historic charm, Massachusetts is known for its prestigious schools. In Boston, tour Harvard, MIT, or Boston University between walks along the Charles and meals in the North End. For a quieter pace, head west to Amherst, Smith College, or Mount Holyoke for leafy streets and tight-knit communities.

If you're open to a broader New England loop, nearby options include Brown, Colby, and Trinity. Head to artsy upstate NY for schools like Vassar, Skidmore, and Bard.

Where to stay in Boston

Hotel AKA Back Bay: This chic boutique property strikes a balance between sleek and comfortable with apartment-style rooms, complete with kitchenettes. It's a solid choice in a quieter pocket of Back Bay but still be close to shopping, restaurants, and cultural sites.

- **Fora Reserve perks** include a \$75 food and beverage credit, welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

The Newbury Boston: This Back Bay landmark is Boston elegance at its best across from the Public Garden and a short walk to Newbury Street shopping. The rooms have a residential feel (some with working fireplaces), and the rooftop restaurant, Contessa, is a local favorite.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food and beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Fairmont Copley Plaza, Boston: A grand, old-world hotel with crystal chandeliers, sweeping staircases, and spacious rooms. Steps from Copley Square and the Boston Public Library, the hotel also is home to a resident black lab named Cori.

- **Fora's Accor Preferred** partner perks include a \$100 property credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Where to stay in Western Massachusetts

Inn on Boltwood (Amherst): A charming, ivy-draped inn right on Amherst's village green that feels like stepping into a New England storybook. Cozy rooms, fireplaces in some suites, and a lovely on-site tavern, all just a short drive from hiking trails, orchards, and bookstores.

Courtyard by Marriott Hadley Amherst: Clean, reliable, and well-located, this is a solid choice if you want space to spread out. It's not trying to be trendy, it just delivers with comfortable rooms, a pool, and easy access to nearby campuses.

The Ellery (Amherst): A stylish boutique hotel that blends mid-century touches with New England charm. Rooms are bright, beds are comfy, and the vibe is more design-forward than you'd expect. It's a great pick for families who want a little character and convenience in one.

Activities



Image courtesy of 1 Hotel San Francisco

If you have a few hours to spare or want to break up campus tours, these local stops add a dose of fun, food, or fresh air to break up the campus circuit.

The West Coast

- **The Getty Center (Los Angeles):** For art, architecture, and gardens that feel elevated without the push of typical tourist chaos, go early or late in the day.

- **Koreatown (Los Angeles):** Grab Korean BBQ or soft serve at Soban or SomiSomi, both are student-favorites not far from USC.
- **Venice Beach (Los Angeles):** Cruise the Venice Beach Boardwalk or walk the canals, then swing by Abbot Kinney for coffee, boutiques, and people-watching.
- **San Francisco (Bay Area):** Browse the Ferry Building's local food stalls, then head to Golden Gate Park for timed-entry at the de Young Museum or Academy of Sciences.
- **Stanford Dish trail (Bay Area):** Stroll through the Stanford Dish trail for scenic views and a good leg stretch, a go-to reset for locals and students alike.
- **Berkeley (Bay Area):** Wander Berkeley's Telegraph Avenue for record shops, used bookstores, and a slice from Blondie's.

The Midwest

- **Ann Arbor, Michigan:** Stroll the Nichols Arboretum for peaceful river trails and hidden student hangouts. Attend a Big Ten game to get a feel for the school's pride.
- **East Lansing, Michigan:** Browse Spartan shops and lively cafés downtown before a walk along the Red Cedar River, an easy mix of campus buzz and natural calm.
- **Columbus, Ohio:** Grab bites at campus favorites like Adriatico's and Condado, then detour to German Village for cobblestone streets, indie bookshops, and cozy cafés.
- **Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania:** Tour the Carnegie Museums near campus, then head to the Strip District for food stalls, quirky shops, and classic Pittsburgh energy.
- **State College, Pennsylvania:** Unwind with a walk or picnic at Penn State's Arboretum, a student-loved green space with open paths and seasonal blooms.

Southern Stops

- **Austin:** Recharge with tacos from Veracruz All Natural, stroll Zilker Park, or cool off at Barton Springs. Head to mural-lined streets in South Congress for vintage shops, Jo's coffee, and creative vibes.
- **Dallas:** Check out the views from Reunion Tower, take a picture at the Fort Worth Water Gardens, and the historic Stockyards district. Slow down in the Bishop Arts District, a walkable strip of indie shops and standout bites.
- **Houston:** Explore the serene Menil Collection's art and sculpture garden. Head to Rice Village for boutique browsing and boba near campus.
- **Waco:** Walk along Baylor's scenic Riverwalk, then stop at Magnolia Market's outdoor food truck park for a bite and a breather.

- **College Station:** Stroll the peaceful trails of Research Park, and check out the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library, just steps from the quad.

DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia)

- **Georgetown (DC):** Walk the Georgetown waterfront trail, then grab a scoop at Thomas Sweet or cupcakes at Baked & Wired.
- **National Mall (DC):** Take a self-guided monuments stroll along the National Mall, from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol.
- **Museums (DC):** Stop in at the National Portrait Gallery or Hirshhorn, both compact enough to do in an hour and steps from Metro stops near GW.
- **College Park, Maryland:** Wander the Paint Branch Trail for a quick nature escape, then head to The Hall CP for fried chicken, BBQ, and a lively student vibe steps from campus.
- **Richmond, Virginia:** Explore Carytown's indie shops, street art, and grab-and-go eats that make it a favorite stop between college tours.
- **Charlottesville, Virginia:** Stroll the historic Downtown Mall's cafés and bookstores. Head to Carter Mountain Orchard for Blue Ridge views, apple picking, and cider donuts.
- **Blacksburg, Virginia:** Take a breather in Virginia Tech's Hahn Horticulture Garden, perfect for a short hike or peaceful moment surrounded by greenery.

New England

- **Charles River Esplanade (Boston):** Walk the Charles River Esplanade between Harvard and BU for city skyline views, student joggers, and rowing crew gliding by.
- **Foodie faves (Boston):** Grab a lobster roll at Quincy Market, duck into Boston Public Market for local snacks and quick bites, or stop for a cannoli at Mike's Pastry.
- **Cambridge (Boston):** Pop into the underrated Harvard Art Museums. Browse indie shops in Harvard Square, like Armageddon Records and Grolier Poetry Book Shop. Take in MIT's offbeat architecture and clever student-built hacks.
- **Freedom Trail (Boston):** Take a self-guided Freedom Trail stroll from Boston Common through the North End to Bunker Hill.
- **Canoe rental (Western MA):** Rent a canoe on the Connecticut River near Amherst for a quiet, scenic contrast to back-to-back info sessions.
- **Emily Dickinson Museum (Western MA):** Browse the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst with a quick visit that adds literary depth to your itinerary.

Add-on destinations



Image courtesy of Omni PGA Frisco Resort & Spa

Build in a little extra time to explore wine country, beach destinations, or even take a cruise. Here are a few ideas to turn your school visits into full-fledged family adventures.

California: From LA, tack on a weekend in San Diego, a beach stay in Santa Monica or Laguna, or go to Disneyland. In the Bay Area, think Napa Valley, Yosemite, or Lake Tahoe. Consider the scenic route along the Pacific Coast Highway between LA and the Bay Area, stretching through Big Sur, Monterey, Santa Barbara, and beyond.

Texas: Between stops in Austin, Dallas, or Houston, a little resort time goes a long way. Just outside Dallas, Omni PGA Frisco offers golf, pools, and dining in a sleek, family-friendly setting. Near Austin, Omni Barton Creek is a Hill Country favorite with spa time and Texas views, perfect for recharging or extending the trip.

New England: Unwind with a couple of days on Cape Cod, filled with beach time, lobster rolls, and lighthouses. If you're visiting Western Mass, you're also a quick drive from the

Berkshires or Vermont for fall foliage, hiking, and mountain town vibes.

Pennsylvania: Add on a stay at Nemacolin, a luxe mountain resort with everything from spa days to off-roading. It's great for a change of pace after Pitt or Carnegie Mellon.

The Midwest: From Ann Arbor, consider a lakefront weekend in Northern Michigan or Traverse City. Small-town charm, boat tours, and sunset views offer a welcome contrast to Big Ten buzz.

DMV (DC, Maryland, Virginia): Wrap up a DMV-area tour with a detour to Maryland's Eastern Shore. St. Michaels and Oxford serve up crab shacks, kayaking, and quiet inns.

Cruises: If your tour lines up with school breaks, consider planning around a short cruise. Take a fall foliage cruise from Boston to Nova Scotia or Maine. Relax in the Western Caribbean from Galveston (right near Houston). Enjoy a three- to seven-day Mexican Riviera trip from LA.

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