

## **TRAVEL PREPARATIONS:**

If you've got your I-20 & VISA, you are done with shopping and you are all set to fly. Some stuff that will help you, make your travel comfortable and worry-free.

The first thing you need is to get an air ticket to San Antonio. The San Antonio airport is officially known as the San Antonio International Airport (SAT). This is about 14 miles from the school. Most of the flights from India do not have San Antonio as their port of entry. Your port of entry, which is the first airport in the US that you arrive at, is where you will go through customs & immigration.

**Tickets:** Reserve your tickets at the earliest to get one smart deal. It is very difficult to get a cheap ticket at the late moment. You should plan with enough time for getting your VISA. Plan to arrive in San Antonio around 3-7 days before the Orientation Date (mentioned in your school documents). Inform us as soon as your travel plans are made in case you need a pickup at the airport. A weekend would be ideal. Most of the students here do not own cars and must plan your airport pick-ups with others who would most probably be working on weekdays. So, try to reach San Antonio either in the evenings or on a weekend, but of course, whenever you reach, we will try our best to receive you at the airport. It will be very convenient if you can plan your journey with friends coming to UTSA. It is imperative that we are informed well in advance, of your arrival, to avoid any confusion. Remember, that San Antonio is 10.5 hours (from April to September and 11.5 hours for the rest of the year) behind Indian time.

**Luggage:** By now, you must have received tons of advice on what to take with you. These "tons of advice" will normally translate into "tons of luggage" and while you may not be averse to the idea of performing the Herculean task of carrying it around airports of the world, we doubt if your back or the airlines would look kindly on this venture. The bag dimensions, the number of bags and the amount of luggage involved changes based on the flight carrier so check with your travel agent or airline site for that information.

**Documents:** REMEMBER - keep all your immigration-related documents (I-20, passport, VISA, etc.) with you. Do not keep them in the check-in luggage. Keep them either in your handbag/purse or carry them with you in your hand. Also keep some clothes (for 2 to 3 days) in your carryon luggage.

### **NOTE:**

- 1) You should keep your passport and I-20 with you at all times - do not put any of your immigration papers in your check-in luggage.
- 2) There have been cases of students losing their check-in baggage so please make sure that you do not keep your original documents and money in the check-in luggage.

## **ARRIVAL IN THE US:**

**Immigration:** You will have to go through customs and immigration at your port of entry. Sometime before the plane lands, the flight attendant will distribute customs declaration forms and immigration forms. Fill these out on the plane. You will submit them to the appropriate US Customs authorities after you land. If you do not understand a form, ask the flight attendant for assistance.

**Customs:** Even if your luggage is booked through to your destination, it will be off-loaded at your port of entry. Just before you land in the port of entry you will be given a form to fill out in the flight, which will reflect your details, country of citizenship, VISA status, passport number, etc. This document is called the I-94. After passing through the immigration area, you will collect your baggage and then, with your baggage, pass through customs. A customs inspector will ask you to declare what you have brought into the country. She/he will inspect your bags and review the customs form you have filled out on the airplane. Penalties for concealing declarable items can be severe, so be honest and make a full declaration. As far as edibles go, just remember that

there should be no fruits, vegetables or anything raw. Pickles, spices, etc. will be allowed in as long as they are packed properly and sealed. Spices are usually classified as non-perishable and dehydrated, and you may declare them as such. You need to be ready with your passport, VISA, filled I-94 form and your I-20 while heading to the Immigration check counters. The officer will endorse the I-94 form and staple it to your passport. Make sure you do not lose it.

**Connecting Flights:** If you will be continuing your journey by air, check in at the appropriate airline counter as soon as you are through customs. In most airports, you might have to change terminals to board your connecting flight. Please ask the airline representative at the counter about changing terminals. You might have to use the Airport Transport System to do so. These counters are right outside the customs area, usually. Remember, it is your responsibility to collect your baggage after passing through immigration, clear it through customs, and get it checked in again for the onward connection. In case your baggage does not arrive on the same flight as you, do not waste too much time hunting for it. Mention it to the airline representative and give them a forwarding address and phone number where you can be reached. In any event, do not miss your connecting flight. In case your flight came in late, or the onward flight is cancelled, it is the responsibility of the airline on which you flew into the country, to make arrangements for another flight and if the delay involves an overnight stay, then the airline has to put you up for the night and also pay for your meals. Do not let the airline representative convince you otherwise.

**NOTE:** Please do not panic if it so happens that your flight arrives late and the time for the connecting flight is too near (say, within the next 10-15 minutes) for you to make it due to Immigration and Customs delays. Simply follow the same actions outlined above and get your airline to arrange things for you. Do not be rude but be firm while dealing with the airline representatives.

If a representative from the airline on which you will be traveling is outside the customs area, tell him/her that you are taking the plane to San Antonio. (Many times, he/she will telephone ahead, and the plane will be held for a few minutes for you.)

**IMPORTANT:** In case you miss your flight and you have requested for an airport pickup it is imperative that you call up the ISA officials and let them know of your modified itinerary. You will find public pay phones throughout the airport and in case the ISA official doesn't pick up your call you can leave them a message on their voice mail.

## **ARRIVAL IN SAN ANTONIO:**

**At the airport:** Please wait at the luggage claim area in case you have requested for a pickup from the airport. There are no payphones outside so do not go around searching for one. You should be able to find one inside near the luggage claim area. If you have communicated your travel plan to us and you find none of us at the airport, wait for at least 45 minutes before trying to find your way to UTSA. Remember to call one of us before you do that. You can contact people via e-mail or phone mentioned in the contact section. If you have been given a contact name and phone number of the person who would be coming to the airport to receive you, please call him/her before you connect with us on the phone number mentioned on the website. The Indian Students' Association has a 100% pickup record and we will try our very best to keep it that way and pickup every student who requests for one. In case your flight has been delayed /postponed do let us know in advance, if possible.

**Using the phone:** A phone call requires 50 cents so keep some change with you. One-dollar notes can be changed in a changing machine. You can also buy a coffee or soft drink with a dollar bill and get change. In case you cannot find a payphone or do not have change for one, you could try asking fellow travelers at the airport in case they have a cellphone. Most of them would be willing to help, especially if they know it is your first day in the US. A US phone number always consists of 10 digits (123) 456 7890. The first three digits are the area code and the remaining are the telephone number. The area code for San Antonio is 210. Making calls to a local number (i.e. to a

telephone number with the same area code as that of yours), you do not need to dial the area code. Also, any numbers starting with 800,888,877 are toll free numbers i.e. you do not need to pay anything for calling those numbers.

**Answering Machine:** This is a way of life for communication here. If you get no response after calling us, wait for the recorded message to come on. There will be a long beep at the end of the message. Leave your message after the beep. If you are calling from the airport give us your name, time and the airport terminal (most important that we know the terminal you are at) that you are in. We regularly check our answering machines.

**Lost / Delayed Luggage:** Rarely, it may happen that your bags do not reach San Antonio with you. DO NOT PANIC. You will get them in a few days. The airlines will deliver them to your apartment. But for this to happen, you will have to talk to the airline officials at the airport. You will be asked to fill a form, do so. You will have to fill in an address on the form - this address will be the place where they will deliver your bags. If you know the exact address where you are going to stay, give that one. If you will be given temporary accommodation after reaching UTSA (which would be true for most of you), put that address for the delivery of your luggage.

If you have not informed us of your arrival or no one is available to pick you up, install the apps Lyft and Uber. They work on credit cards so make sure you have a credit card added to your account before you try booking a ride. They also use debit cards but for Indian debit cards to work you will have to inform your bank beforehand.

You should not have any problems traveling and reaching here. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any help. Bon Voyage!!