



Dear International Visitor:

Welcome to the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, and the city of New Orleans. This Guide to Daily Living was prepared by International Services to assist you with general questions you may have about the services we offer and as a new resident of our city. If you have questions that aren't answered here, please let us know and we'll do our best to help. New Orleans is a very exciting city that is proud of its colorful history, mix of cultures, world famous music, and a seemingly endless variety of restaurants.

We wish you a very happy, memorable, and safe stay in our city and look forward to meeting you in person. Please remember to call or email when you arrive at the LSUHSC campus and schedule an appointment so we can help you start time here.

Kindest personal regards,

LSUHSC International Services

[illegible]

We are here to help you with:

- NOTE:** the contents of this document are provided as general information only. Please contact International Services for more detailed information, and be sure to make yourself familiar with our extensive website at <https://www.lsuhsu.edu/administration/academic/ois/>

Immigration Related Terms and Documents

This is a list of terms that you will most likely encounter during your time in the United States as a non-immigrant visitor. If anything is not clear, please feel free to contact us and we'll do our best to explain it further.

Adjustment of Status: this term is used to refer to individuals who are applying to convert their status to that of a Permanent Resident without departing the United States and re-entering in a different status.

CBP: CBP stands for Customs and Border Patrol, and is part of DHS. CBP is responsible for security at U.S. ports and land borders and is responsible for inspection of all individuals who wish to lawfully enter the United States.

Change of Status: this term refers to individuals who would like to change from one status (ex. F-1 to H1B) to another, except for that of Permanent Resident, without leaving the U.S. and re-entering in a different status.

(DHS) Department of Homeland Security: is a U.S. government agency whose mission is to protect the United States against threats. DHS includes USCIS, CBP, ICE and many other federal agencies.

DS-2019: The DS-2019 is an important immigration document issued by a program sponsor (LSUHSC-NO), which makes an individual eligible for J-1/J-2 status. You may remain in the U.S. as a J-1/J-2 exchange visitor for up to five years from the start date of your program. Your DS-2019 must remain valid during the entire stay in the U.S. A DS-2019 must be endorsed, or signed, by the Responsible Officer or Alternate Responsible Officer before departing for a trip outside the U.S. if you plan to return to continue your program here. Each J-1/J-2 should sign their own DS-2019 with the exception of minor children, whose form may be signed by their J-1 parent.

Employment Authorization Document (EAD) or I-766: An EAD is issued by USCIS to persons who have requested specific work authorization or persons who are authorized to work because of their immigration status. The EAD is a small plastic card similar to a driver's license which contains the photo, biographical information and dates of employment authorization belonging to the individual. The EAD card may also contain travel permission if issued to an individual who is adjusting status to permanent resident.

Entry Visa: Your entry visa is a page inserted into your passport at the U.S. Embassy or consulate when you were granted your visa. It contains your biographical information and photograph, and looks similar to a passport. The expiration date on the visa does not matter as long as you have entered the U.S. before that date. An entry visa is simply a document, which lets you ask to enter the U.S. If your visa has expired, and you need to travel abroad, you will need to get a new visa while you are abroad in order to be able to return to the U.S. An entry visa cannot be renewed within the U.S.

I-20: The I-20 is an important immigration document, issued by an authorized school (LSUHSC-NO) which makes an individual eligible for F-1/F-2 status. An individual may remain in the U.S. as an F-1 student (or F-2 dependent) for the time it takes the F-1 student complete their course of study, any authorized training and a 60 day grace period to depart the U.S. The I-20 must remain valid during the entire stay in the U.S. An I-20 must be endorsed (signed) by the DSO or PDSO before departing for a trip outside the U.S. if they plan to return and continue their studies.. Each F-1 should sign their own I-20, as well as that of their F-2 dependent.

I-94: The I-94 is a record of your admission to the United States, and is proof of your legal visitor status. You can find it on the [CBP website](#). (note: some visitors entering the U.S. by land or water may be issued a paper I-94 at the border). We strongly encourage you to check your I-94 shortly after entering the country to confirm that all the information is correct.

I-797 Notice: A paper notice issued by USCIS to provide documentation that a particular petition or application has been received and accepted by USCIS (Receipt Notice) or to convey the decision made (Approval or Denial) on a particular application or petition by USCIS.

ICE: ICE stands for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and is part of DHS. ICE is responsible for criminal and civil enforcement of federal laws governing border control, customs, trade, and immigration including location, detention and removal of persons who are not authorized to be present in the United States.

Adjustment of Status: this term is used to refer to individuals who are applying to convert their status to that of a Permanent Resident without departing the United States and re-entering in a different status.

Non-Immigrant: A non-immigrant is someone who plans to come to the U.S. for a short period for a specific reason, and plans to leave after that purpose has been completed. Those in B1/B2, F-1, J-1, H-1B, TN and VW status are considered to be non-immigrants.

Passport: Your passport must always remain valid while in the United States. If it is close to expiring, you should contact your country's embassy or consulate in the U.S. to apply for a renewal. If your passport is lost or stolen, notify your consulate immediately and arrange to have it replaced. In order to re-enter the U.S. from a trip abroad, a passport needs to be valid for at least six months after the end date on your I-797, I-20 or DS-2019. For example, if the end date on your DS-2019 is January 1, 2022, the expiration date on your passport must not be before May 1, 2022. If your passport is not valid for six months past your program/approval end date, have it renewed either in the U.S. through a consulate or embassy before you leave the U.S., or have it renewed during a return trip to your home country. Make sure you allow enough time to receive the new passport before your return to the U.S.

Permanent Resident: a person who is authorized to remain in the United States to live and work indefinitely. Permanent Residents have many, though not all, of the same rights and privileges as U.S. Citizens.

PDSO and DSO: stands for Principal Designated School Official and Designated School Official. These are the persons at your school authorized to issue and endorse Form I-20. They are also responsible for reporting to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) on certain activities of F-1 students through the SEVIS system. Each SEVP authorized school must have at least one PDSO and can have multiple DSOs.

RO and ARO: stands for Responsible Officer and Alternate Responsible Officer. These are the persons at your school or institution authorized to issue and endorse Form DS-2019. They are also responsible for reporting to the Department of State (DOS) on certain activities of J students and scholars through the SEVIS system. Each Exchange Visitor Program must have at least one RO and can have multiple AROs.

SEVIS: the Internet-based system where DHS maintains information on SEVP-certified schools, as well as the international students who come to the United States to study in F or M status and attend those schools. SEVIS also maintains information on DOS-designated visitor program sponsors and J-1 visa exchange visitor program participants.

SEVP: Stands for the Student and Exchange Visitor Program. SEVP is a part of the National Security Investigations Division and acts as a bridge for government organizations that have an interest in information on nonimmigrants whose primary reason for coming to the United States is to study full time.

USCIS: USCIS stands for United States Citizenship and Immigration Services. This is a U.S. government agency that is part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. This agency is responsible for overseeing lawful immigration to the United States and adjudicating applications for immigration related benefits.

USCIS Forms: USCIS forms (I-129, I-539, I-765) are used for many different reasons. They can be used to apply for various immigration benefits, replace immigration related documents, verify employment authorization or to have someone else petition for immigration benefits on your behalf. All immigration related forms are available free of charge on the USCIS website uscis.gov. You should never pay anyone to obtain a blank USCIS form!

Visa or Immigration Status: The entry visa in your passport allows you to apply to enter the U.S. and be inspected by a Homeland Security /Customs and Border Patrol Officer. That Officer then may grant you a visa/immigration status. The visa/immigration status is noted on your I-94, for example "F-1" or "J-1." Your entry visa has an expiration date, and so does your visa/immigration status (indicated on your I-94), but they are not always the same date.

Applying for a Non-Immigrant Entry Visa

Please refer to the LSUHSC New Orleans International Services website for specific information on what is needed to [apply for an entry visa](#) depending on the status you will have when you enter.

[Instructions for Applying for a F-1 Visa](#)

[Instruction for Applying for a H-1B Visa](#)

[Instructions for Applying for a J-1 Visa](#)

The SEVIS Fee

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) collects a fee to cover the costs for the continued operation of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). This fee is used to administer and maintain the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS), support compliance activities, and establish SEVIS Liaison Officers to provide information and assistance to students and schools.

The payment of I-901 fees is recorded and tracked in SEVIS. You can (and should) also print a paper copy of the receipt once you have paid.

Only those in F-1 or J-1 status are required to pay the SEVIS fee.

Who pays for the fee and how much is it?

For F-1 students	\$350
For F-2 spouses and dependent children	None
For J-1 Exchange Visitors	\$220
For J-2 spouses and dependent children	None

When do you pay the SEVIS fee?

- You should pay the fee before you go to the U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for your visa
- If you are a citizen of Canada, Bermuda, the Bahamas, or certain other islands described in 8 CFR 212., you must pay the SEVIS fee before entering the U.S., even if you aren't required to have a visa stamp in your passport. A U.S. immigration official will inspect your papers either at a preclearance site in your country or when you request entry to the United States. You must have with you proof of citizenship, your admission letter from the university or program you plan to attend, your I-20 or DS-2019, and proof of financial support in the amount listed on your Certificate of Eligibility. You should also carry a receipt for the I-901 fee with these other documents.
- Non-immigrants currently in the United States who apply for change of status to F-1 or J-1 status will need to pay the fee before filing their change of status application.

How can the fee bill be paid?

- You may pay the fee:
- Online at fmjfee.com using a credit or debit card
- Through Western Union
- Through the mail by submitting a completed Form I-901 and a check or money order drawn on a U.S. bank and payable in U.S. currency.

Please refer to the instructions for each method found at fmjfee.com

How will the payment be verified?

The payment will be recorded in the SEVIS system. However, we recommend that you also hand-carry a paper receipt to the consular interview and when you arrive at the Port of Entry.

You can find more information on the SEVIS fee [here](#).

I-515

If the immigration officer is not satisfied with some part of the documents you show them, but still believes that you are honestly entering to attend school in the U.S., they can allow you to enter for a temporary period of 30 days. If this is the case, the immigration officer will issue you a form known as an I-515. If you are given an I-515, be sure to let us know at International Services as soon as possible. The form will have instructions on how to fix the problem and extend your stay beyond the 30 days (which is generally easy to do), but you need to take action quickly.

Checking In

Once you arrive at LSU Health Sciences Center in New Orleans, it is important that you contact International Services to schedule an appointment for an orientation and a thorough review of your documents. The office telephone number is (504) 568-4802, and our email address is internationalservices@lsuhsc.edu. This introduction will allow us to answer any questions you may have and help you correct any errors which may have occurred during the entry process.

Travel Documents

Passport

Your passport is your basic travel document, a formal permit from your government to travel abroad and return to your country. It is also your primary form of identification outside your home country. Your passport must remain valid at all times, and when possible, for 6 months beyond your approved stay. It can be renewed at your consulate or embassy. If you lose your passport, you must apply for a new one through your consulate or embassy. You can find the addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of many consulates in New Orleans online.

Entry Visa

An entry visa is a sticker, or foil, issued and placed in your passport by an officer at an American Consulate or Embassy outside the United States. You cannot get a new entry visa or renew it while you are inside the U.S. The entry visa authorizes you to enter the U.S., but it does not tell you how long you are allowed to stay in the country. That is covered by the I-94. Your entry visa will have an expiration date, and may be valid for one, two, or multiple entries.

If your entry visa expires while you are in the U.S., that won't necessarily be a problem. If your I-94 is marked as "D/S", that means you can stay in the U.S. as long as your program has not expired, and is correct on your I-20 or DS-2019. If you have what's known as a "date certain" "Admit Until Date", you will need to leave the U.S. or make some other change by then. Be sure to let us know at International Services if this is the case.

For most visitors, though, the expiration of the entry visa only means that you will need to apply for a new entry visa before coming back after a trip outside the U.S. There is an exception for travel to Canada, Mexico or most of the islands in the Caribbean (except for Cuba) for a period of 30 days or less. This policy is known as Automatic Visa Revalidation. Contact International Services for more information.

Form I -94-Arrival/Departure Record

The I-94 is a very important document. It shows when you entered the U.S., what non-immigrant status you were admitted in, and when the status will expire. This is usually an electronic document, and almost all visitors will have to print it from the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website. If you enter the U.S. by land or by water, you may be issued a paper copy, but those are not common.

We strongly advise that you check your I-94 online to be sure the information is correct. You can do that [here](#).

Daily Living General Information

Social Security Number (SSN) or Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN)

A Social Security Number, or SSN, is a number issued by the U.S. Government to help keep track of a person's payments into the Social Security System, which is a form of retirement account. Since visitors in non-immigrant status are by definition not expected to be in the US when they retire, they are not required to pay into the system, and will therefore (technically) not need an SSN.

However, this number is required by employers for tax purposes, so non-immigrants can be issued an SSN if they have legitimate work authorization. You will not be given an SSN unless you have valid work authorization.

The SSN is NOT work authorization. It is not required in order to begin a job. Once it is issued to you, though, it's yours for life. Even if you leave the U.S. and come back years later, that number will still be yours. Generally, you won't need to show the actual card as long as you know the number, but it can be difficult to replace the card, so store it somewhere safe and try not to lose it.

There may be circumstances where a person who is not eligible for an SSN needs a number to comply with U.S. tax laws and to help process tax returns and payments. In such cases, you can apply for an [Individual Taxpayer Identification Number, or ITIN](#). The International Services website also has information [here](#).

Tips on Staying Safe in New Orleans

New Orleans is a city known for its culture, entertainment and cuisine. However, like many U.S. cities, it can be dangerous. The best way to avoid any dangerous situations is to use common sense. Do not carry a lot of cash, pay attention to your surroundings, and do not leave your personal items unattended or unlocked. If you are the victim of a crime, call 911 as soon as you can get to a phone.

911

Dialing 911 will connect you to emergency services. This is for any situation that requires immediate help from the police, fire department or an ambulance. The person who answers your call will ask questions about the location of the emergency, what kind of emergency it is, and details that will help them decide what kind of help to send. They may give you instructions on what to do until help arrives. If you call, don't hang up until the person at the call center tells you to.

The emergency number on the LSUHSC campus is 504-568-8999. If you have a non-life threatening situation, you should call the local or [campus police](#).

Home

Always keep your doors and windows locked. Install window locks or stops on windows, especially on the first floor. It's a good idea to keep a light or radio on while you're away as this gives the impression that someone is home.

Car

When parking your car at night, choose a well-lit area. If the area doesn't look or feel safe, don't park there, if you have a choice. Always lock your doors and never leave valuables on your car seats where they're visible. It's safest to lock them in the trunk. Make sure you know where you're going before you leave the house. Keep a map and flashlight in your glove compartment.

Walking

It's not a good idea to walk alone, especially at night. As a courtesy, the campus police or security will escort you to your car. Call 504-568-8999 to arrange that. When crossing the street, look both ways for traffic. Drivers don't always stop for pedestrians, even though they should. If you choose to walk somewhere, be sure you're aware of your surroundings. Thieves work in a variety of settings, hoping to catch someone who isn't paying attention.

Domestic Violence is a learned pattern of behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other person. The partners may be married or not, gay or straight, living together, separated, or dating. Examples of domestic violence are emotional abuse, isolation from family or friends, actual or threatened physical harm, sexual assault, stalking, or intimidation.

Domestic abuse is illegal in the United States. To get immediate assistance, call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at 1-800-799-7233. Getting help will not affect your visa status.

Identity Theft This is one of the fastest growing crimes in America. It may occur if someone steals your personal information, such as your name, SSN, and address, and the proceeds to pretend to be you. Thieves often use this information to open credit card or bank accounts, get loans, buy things for themselves, or even get a job in your name. Some ways to protect yourself include:

- Don't give your SSN or credit card number to anyone who calls or emails you and asks for it.
 - Don't carry your Social Security card with you – you won't need it. Memorize the number and leave the card at home.
 - Be aware of various types of online crime, like 'phishing'.
- If you think you might be a victim of identity theft, visit identitytheft.gov for more information.

Children

Child Care

If both parents are working, you may need to find suitable childcare. LSUHSC offers childcare on campus at the Early Learning Center at the Human Development Center. You can find more information [here](#).

When searching for suitable childcare, you may be able to obtain references from other parents. All childcare facilities in the United States must be licensed by the state, so it is wise to check credentials and visit the facility before enrolling your child. You can find a list of licensed facilities by parish [here](#).

School-Age Children

Once you've settled in you'll need to learn about schools in your area. The law in the US states that children between 5 and 16 years of age must attend school. Your children can attend public or private schools. The public school they will attend is determined by where you live. The school year generally begins in August, ends in May, and there is a summer vacation between May and August. A list of public schools can be found by visiting jpschools.org for Jefferson Parish, nolapublicschools.com for Orleans Parish, or stpsb.org for St. Tammany Parish.

You can find more information on sending your children to school in the U.S. [here](#).

Housing

One of the first decisions to be made when you arrive in the United States is where to live. There are many different types of living quarters to choose from.

On Campus Housing

If you're here as a student, living on campus may help you adjust to your new surroundings more quickly. LSUHSC offers on-campus housing for students. You can visit the [student housing website](#), or call them at 504-568-6260.

Because living on campus is popular, there usually is a waiting list to get in. Living off campus usually involved extra expenses such as utilities (gas, electric, water & sewage). The tenant is usually responsible for having utilities connected. There are many places to choose from, such as a studio apartment, efficiency, regular apartment, house, or shared housing. You can search online, using places such as homes.nola.com or Zillow.com.

Apartments

The cost of renting an apartment can vary substantially depending on location and size. Most apartments require first month's rent, deposit and signing a lease. A lease is a contract between you and the owner that documents rights and responsibilities. You may wish to have a roommate, which will lower the cost. Most apartments are unfurnished, but you can rent a furnished apartment for an added fee. Furnished apartments usually include a bed, chest of drawers, a couch, dining room table and chairs.

Efficiency-A single room with a private bathroom. The room will include a small kitchen and a place to sleep. Sometimes utilities are included with the rent.

A **Studio** has a separate kitchen and eating area and is (slightly) larger than an efficiency.

To check the various types of accommodations, locations, and pricing, go to:

www.apartmenthomesbytonti.com

www.1stlake.com

www.forrent.com

www.apartments.com

Houses

This would be roomier than apartments and can be cost effective if you have a family, or roommates sharing it with you. When renting a house, you may be responsible for paying for your water and sewage in addition to the electric and internet bills. The following is a list of contact information to get your utilities connected.

Utilities

Orleans Parish

Water	504-529-2837	swbno.org
Electric	1-800-368-3749	entergy-neworleans.com/residential/entergy-neworleans.com
Gas	1-800-368-3749	

Jefferson Parish

Water	504-736-6060	jeffparish.net/departments/water-department
Electric	1-800-368-3749	Entergy Louisiana Residential
Gas	1-800-368-3749	Entergy Louisiana Residential

Phones

Cell phones

Cellular service is available from various providers in the area. The cost will depend on the calling plan and features you choose. Three of the largest companies are AT&T, Verizon, and T-Mobile. Prepaid cell phones are also available from a variety of retailers: Walmart, Best Buy, AT&T, Verizon. Most of these will require a certain dollar amount to be purchased every 90 days or so. The phones work like a regular cell phones and usually require an email address to set up and activate the service. Instructions for activation and use should come with the phone at the time of purchase.

Shopping

Shopping is a favorite pastime of many Americans. Most cities in America have large selections of stores and goods to choose from. Prices can vary significantly from one place to another, but it's not a general practice to barter in the U.S., except when buying used goods.

Be aware that the 'sales tax' is not included in the displayed price.

Sales tax varies for each parish, and is added by the sales clerk when you check out and pay.

Department

Carry a wide range of merchandise such as clothing, shoes, bed linens, dishes and jewelry. These include J.C. Penney, and Macy's.

Discount Stores

Sell items similar to department stores but are generally less expensive. Discount stores may also carry cosmetics, prescription and non-prescription drugs, household goods, food, and appliances. These include Walmart, Target, and Big Lots.

Convenience Stores

Carry a limited number of items such as ice, milk, drinks, and snacks. As the name implies, convenience stores tend to be located in residential areas, and are often open 24 hours a day. Prices tend to be higher than other stores. Most gas stations will have a convenience store attached to them. These include Discount Zone and Circle K.

Drugstores

Carry more than prescription and non-prescription medications. They also carry magazines, cosmetics, personal products, toys, food and drinks. Some will have a photo shop. Examples are Walgreens and CVS.

Shopping Malls

Malls will have several department stores as well as a variety of specialty stores, like shoes, clothing, electronics, etc. They usually have a food court with a variety of fast food available. Local malls include Clearview, Riverwalk, Canal Place, Lakeside, Oakwood and Esplanade.

Factory Outlets

These outlets and wholesale stores sell merchandise directly from the manufacturer, usually at a lower price. Be careful, though, as some items could have flaws or defects, and may not be returnable.

Grocery Stores

Can be small and carry specialty foods, or large and carry many kinds of products. The large grocery stores, also called supermarkets, are usually part of a chain of stores and may be less expensive. These include Winn Dixie, Whole Foods, and Rouse's. Many supermarkets will have a small section for international foods. There's also the International Market at 3940 Baron St in Metairie.

Buying Used Goods

Second-hand stores carry inexpensive used goods, mostly clothing. Common sources of second-hand items are thrift shops, Goodwill, 'flea markets', and garage or yard sales, where people sell their items in their yard or garage. Items are usually of good quality and are simply no longer needed by those selling them. Stores can be found online, while garage or yard sales are advertised by hand-made signs posted in the neighborhood, or listings on sites like Craigslist, Facebook, and Nextdoor. Be aware, though, that items you buy at these sales are generally not returnable. Be very cautious about buying things through sites like Craigslist. Never give out your personal information and arrange to meet in a public place.

Transportation

Cars

They are convenient, particularly if you have your family with you. However, if you live on or near campus, you'll find walking, biking or using public transportation to be much less expensive. Taxis, Uber, and Lyft can fill in the gaps for longer distances or shopping trips.

Driver's License

The [Louisiana Office of Motor Vehicles \(OMV\)](#) will provide a Louisiana driver's license, learner's permit, or state ID card to foreign nationals who are or will be residents of the United States for at least 30 days from the date of application and have acceptable documentation. In addition, to obtain a regular driver's license, learner's permit or State ID Card, you must provide proof of lawful entry into the United States. *Please note that the OMV accepts original documents only.* Each applicant for a driver's license must comply with all identification, medical and vision requirements before the administration of any test. More information can be found [here](#).

To drive a car in Louisiana you must have the following:

- ✓ A valid driver's license with you in the car. If you are caught without a driver's license, you could receive a jail sentence and/or monetary fine.
- ✓ Liability insurance on the car you are driving, and proof of that coverage. Louisiana requires minimum insurance coverage of \$15,000 per person, and \$30,000 per accident. If you are involved in an accident and are found to be without insurance, your driver's license can be revoked and you could be subjected to fines. Be sure to tell the insurance company/agent that you are an international student/researcher and confirm that you are eligible for coverage. There have been incidents in the past where people thought they were insured and only found out after an accident that their insurance company would not pay any claims because they were foreign nationals.
- ✓ A valid Safety Inspection Sticker, or Brake Tag, is required in Louisiana. This inspection sticker must be renewed every year for \$14, or every other year for \$20. It takes only a few minutes to go through the process. If you are stopped by the police and don't have one, you could be fined or your car could be towed.

Traffic Accidents

Traffic accidents should be reported to the police. The manner of reporting may vary according to the parish you're in. Call 911 to report it and follow the instructions given. In general you shouldn't move your car, unless it's blocking traffic and is able to be moved. You should exchange information with other drivers involved in the accident, such as their name, address, driver's license number, insurance company information, license plate number. Take photos of the damage if possible.

Don't Do Facts

- In Louisiana, you will get a ticket if the driver or passengers are not wearing seatbelts.
- Be sure to observe speed limits and drive with caution at all times. If a police officer stops you and gives you a ticket, do not try to pay the officer with cash, as that could be perceived as bribery, which is against the law. Signing the ticket is not an admission of guilt, only an acknowledgement that you received the ticket. You can pay the ticket through the mail or online. You can also request a hearing at traffic court if you want to contest the ticket. All the information you need will be printed on the ticket.
- Drinking and driving is against the law, despite the looser laws in New Orleans about drinking in public. If you receive a DWI (Driving While Intoxicated) ticket, you could be subject to heavy fines and a possible jail sentence.
- Texting while driving is also illegal.

You can find more information about traffic laws in Louisiana [here](#):

Buying a Car

If you only need a car for a few days, renting is probably the best option. If you decide to buy a car, you need to decide between buying new or used. Used cars are much less expensive, of course, but you should be careful to have a reliable mechanic check the car for problems before you buy it. Car dealerships will have used cars, while individuals will sell cars through Craigslist, Facebook, etc. There are online companies such as [Carfax.com](#) or [Edmunds.com](#) that may be helpful. The [Kelly Blue Book](#) is a useful source for average prices for cars based on the year it was made and the features it has. [Consumer Reports](#) is also a good resource.

Leasing a Car

Another option is leasing a car. It tends to be more expensive than buying, but there are some advantages, depending on your situation. Research it carefully if this is an option that appeals to you.

Taxi Cabs

A ride can be arranged by calling the taxi service listed online. It's customary to give the driver a tip of 10-15% in addition to the cost of the ride. You can pay by credit card or cash.

Uber and Lyft

Ride-hailing systems similar to taxis. You need to install their app on your phone and set them up before using the services, as everything is done through your phone, including the payment, which is quoted to you in advance and then paid once you agree.

Buses and Streetcars

Riding the bus or streetcar is an inexpensive way to get around the city. A schedule for the bus/streetcar service can be gotten from the [Regional Transit Authority \(RTA\)](#). You can also visit the RTA at 2817 Canal Street or call 504-242-2600 for a schedule and pricing for fares. You should note that while you can pay the fare on the bus/streetcar in cash, any change you get back will be in the form of a card that you can use later. There is a phone app called Le Pass App that will allow you to look up routes and buy your tickets online. You can also travel between states with the national Greyhound bus service.

Bicycles

A bicycle is an inexpensive means of travel. Invest in a good lock, though, since they are often stolen. U-shaped locks with cylindrical keys are the best. You must obey all traffic laws and signals while riding a bike.

Airplanes

Information about flights in and out of New Orleans can be found through the Louis Armstrong New Orleans International Airport at 504-303-7500, or online at [flymsy.com](#)

Trains

Riding on the national train tends to be more expensive here than it is in most countries. You can contact Amtrak for more information at 1-800-872-7245 or visit [www.amtrak.com](#)

Hitchhiking

The act of standing by the roadside to get free rides from passing cars or trucks is **illegal** in the U.S.

Money/Banking

Monetary System

The US monetary system is decimal based, with one dollar equal to one hundred cents. Paper currency is used for amounts of one dollar or more and coins are used for amounts up to and including a dollar. More information [here](#).

Exchanging Money

Some banks, such as Hancock Whitney or Chase, will exchange foreign currency for a fee. No banks will exchange foreign coins. Currency can be exchanged at the airport or a major hotel.

Checking Account

Opening a checking or savings account at a local bank may be useful for things like paying bills. DO NOT send cash through the mail. Credit cards, personal checks or online payments are much safer.

LSUHSC has a credit union, [Campus Federal Credit Union](#). A credit union is effectively the same as a bank, but it is not for profit, and charges fewer (and lower) fees than banks.

Money Orders

A money order is similar to a check, and are useful if you don't have a checking account. You can buy them at supermarkets or convenience stores. For a small fee, the cashier will give you a money order for the amount you want.

Credit and Debit Cards

Credit or debit cards are widely used in the U.S. Many stores will only accept them instead of cash (although there are also stores in New Orleans, particularly smaller ones, that only accept cash). You should be able to use a credit card from your home country. Check before you leave to see if that is possible. If not, open a local account and get a debit card, which takes funds directly from your bank account.

U.S. Tax Basics

Who

Every nonresident or resident alien (Non-U.S. Citizen) visa/status holder in the U.S. who has earned U.S. income must file an annual tax return and/or a statement to substantiate their status with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) AND the State of Louisiana. More information about how to determine if your status is resident or nonresident alien for tax purposes can be found [here](#).

**Resident/Non-Resident status for tax purposes is not always the same as residency status for immigration. purposes.*

Exception: If you are a non-resident and the amount of U.S. wages you receive is less than the personal exemption amount allowed for the tax year, it is possible you may not be required to file an income tax return. More information for nonresidents [here](#).

What

Nonresident visa holders must file tax returns on Form 1040NR, 'U.S. Nonresident Alien Income Tax Return,' or Form 1040NR- EZ, 'U.S. Income Tax Return for Certain Nonresident Aliens with No Dependents.' They must also attach Form 8843 to prove that they are nonresidents of the U.S. for tax purposes (This form is required even if you don't have any U.S. source income, and are not required to file a tax return). More information on Non Resident forms [here](#).

Resident Status

Visa holders must file returns on form 1040EZ, 1040A or 1040 depending on the exemptions and dependents they can claim. More information on which form to file [here](#).

Information on what form to use for State of Louisiana returns can be found [here](#).

When

If you are a resident or nonresident alien who earned wages subject to withholding, you must mail your federal tax return on or before April 15th. Louisiana State tax returns are also due on or before May 15th. Remember that taxes are for the calendar year, statements and tax returns for the current year cannot be filed before January 1st of the following year. For instance, tax returns for 2024 will be filed in 2025.

Where

All nonresident alien tax returns and statements are e-filed or mailed to the IRS Service Center listed in the instructions [here](#). All resident alien tax returns are mailed to the address included on the form's instructions.

Tax Tips

- Before mailing your return to the IRS or the State of Louisiana, you should make and keep a photocopy of your completed tax forms and any documentation submitted with them. In addition to maintaining good tax records, you will probably need a copy of any previous tax returns to complete your current return. If the IRS or the State of Louisiana should question your return, you cannot respond properly without an exact copy of the documents you submitted. As the IRS charges a fee to send you a photocopy of your return, it's much less expensive to make your own copy.
- Non-immigrants applying to USCIS for permanent residency may be required to produce copies of returns filed for the last three years.

Weather and Climate

New Orleans has mild winters and hot, humid summers. It is also famous for being the target of tropical storms and hurricanes. Here are some terms you should become familiar with:

- Tropical Storm Watch means tropical storm conditions are possible in a specified area of the watch, usually within 36 hours.
- Tropical Storm Warning indicates tropical storm conditions are expected in the area, usually within 24 hours.
- Hurricane Watch means hurricane conditions are possible in a specified area within 36 hours.
- Hurricane Warning means hurricane conditions are expected in the area within 24 hours.

These storms originate in the tropical waters of the Caribbean, and differ in severity depending on the speed of the winds within the storm. Hurricane season, when the storms are most likely to occur, is between June 1st and November 30th of each year. There are often storms that pass through our area without causing major damage, but there are times when people are encouraged or even ordered to evacuate for their safety. During your orientation on the LSUHSC campus, you'll get more detailed information about how to prepare for hurricanes. Read this information carefully so you'll be prepared.

We do have cold weather here, too, although that is a relative term. The coldest months are between November and January, when temperatures are as low as the 40s F. Spring begins in February or March, and June brings summer weather, when it is in the 80s or 90s F. It's very humid, which makes it feel hotter, so be prepared to sweat. It rains a lot, with short intense storms being common, especially in the afternoon. Flooding is common, at least for a short while, since the water table is very high.

Hurricane Season Resources:

- [Louisiana Emergency Preparedness Guide](#)
- [Get a Game Plan](#)
- [New Orleans Hurricane and Tropical Weather Guide](#)
- [LSUHSC Hurricane Preparation Tips](#)

Cultural Adjustment

Culture

Refers to the ideas, ways of thinking, and customary behaviors that are shared by members of a particular group. A nation, an organization, a family, even a classroom can have their own culture. This section talks about culture at a national level, as much as that is possible.

Culture Shock

The feeling of disorientation or confusion that occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. Moving to a place that may be very different from your home involves many changes that can affect your health and sense of well-being.

International Tiger Tips

- Maintain your perspective. Remember that many people have come to New Orleans from other countries, have lived through the experience, and come out stronger on the other side.
- Keep an open mind. People in New Orleans are acting according to their own set of values.
- Try not to judge their behavior by the standards you would use in your own country.
- Evaluate your expectations. If you feel disappointed, ask yourself if your expectations were unrealistic.
- Learn from your experience. Moving to a new culture can be a fascinating and educational experience. The experience can broaden your point of view and expand your personality. See how much you can learn while you are here.

Stereotypes

Standardized mental pictures that are held in common by a group of people that often represent an oversimplified opinion. They're easy, quick ways to think of someone from another country or group. You should try to rid yourself of any preconceived notions you have of Americans before you arrive. Some of the stereotypes you hear will be true about specific individuals or groups, but not the entire population. While you're here, see if you can learn more about which stereotypes you had when you first got here turned out to be 'true', and which are not.

Greetings

"Good Morning", "Good Afternoon" and "How are you?" are formal greetings. Usually, people just say "Hello" or more commonly, "Hi." People in New Orleans may greet you with 'Alright'. Americans tend to be quite informal compared to those from other countries. Good manners and being polite is always appropriate and will only reflect well on you.

Invitations

Reply to invitations as soon as possible. Appointments for social affairs are more flexible than those for business functions. It is acceptable to arrive at a social affair at staggered hours but this is generally not acceptable for a dinner invitation or a business affair which may have a more structured timeline. If you find that your plans change and you can't attend, let the hosts know as soon as you can so they can make adjustments to their schedule.

Saying Thank You

It's considerate to send a thank you note to your host or hostess, either by email or regular mail. It is not necessary to bring a gift if you are invited for dinner only. If you are invited to a birthday party or a special holiday event, a small inexpensive gift is appropriate. Saying "thank you" is always appreciated.

Use of Names

We tend to use first names more readily used in the U.S. than in other countries. It is acceptable to use the first name of someone your age or younger. If someone is older than you are or you don't know a person's name, you may address a man as "Sir" and a woman as "Ma'am".

Personal Distance

Americans tend to require more personal distance than most cultures. The standard space between you and your conversation partner is two feet. Try to avoid physical contact while you are speaking. For the casual acquaintance this is too intimate. It is, however, a common practice and custom to shake hands when first meeting someone. If a person extends his or her hand to you, it is acceptable for you to extend yours in return. If you aren't comfortable shaking hands because it's not accepted in your culture or health practices, you can explain the cultural difference simply, but with a smile. People may be confused, but will usually not be offended if it's done with a smile.

Dining Out

Most restaurants do not include a tip or gratuity on your bill. You should tip the server between 18% and 20%. It's common for a group going out to together to pay their own way for entertainment or food.

Again, welcome to the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center and New Orleans! We wish you an enjoyable and educational experience during your stay and hope you come to realize what a diverse and interesting city you are visiting. For more information about our city and state, visit Louisiana Office of Tourism, nola.com, louisiana.gov, neworleans.com.

LSUHSC GDL Preparation Acknowledgements

NAFSA Adviser's Manual (NAFSA: Association of International Educators); Orientation Handbook (American-Mideast Educational & Training Services, Inc.); The International Student Handbook (American Immigration Law Foundation); Staying Safe (Entergy Corporation) An Immigration Handbook for International Students (David A. M. Ware, Ware Immigration); LSUHSC International Services Office Manual (Rose Chatelain)