



Disclaimer: All views expressed here may not apply to all students and all department. It is meant to give students a general idea and ANKUR cannot be held responsible in any event. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Can I get a TA/RA position in my department? Getting a teaching assistantship is based on rules and funding of your department or program. You must contact your department directly for this. Or else, personally contact any of the students in the Department Contact List of the pitt\_grad\_ankur Yahoo! Group.

Does Ankur provide temporary accommodation? Yes. We provide temporary accommodation for a maximum of one week. You will be accommodated at homes of the current graduate students at the University of Pittsburgh. You must take care of your food, travel and other personal expenses. During this time, you have to search for an apartment and move in as early as you can. Important - Please fill in the information in the appropriate database in the 'Database' section of the pitt\_grad\_ankur Yahoo! Group. How much does it cost for temporary accommodation? Temporary accommodation is free. You will be staying along with the current graduate students at the

University of Pittsburgh. When is the best time to arrive at Pittsburgh? The best time is to arrive at Pittsburgh is one week before the international orientation. During the one week, you should hunt for a suitable apartment, meet with the department faculty or possibly even work out your TA/RA options with the faculty.

I do not have a scholarship. Can I get an on-campus job? Yes. You can work in the library, Campus Computing labs, etc. For an on-campus job work for 20 hours a week at \$6/ hr, after tax you get \$5/hr, one can earn upto ~ \$400 per month.

I have an on-campus job. Can I get another on-campus job? No. What would be an appropriate amount of money to carry with me from India? Arrival Expenses

Analysis:

\$350 - deposit for apartment

Per month

\$350 – apartment rent \$100 - groceries \$100 - eating outside \$100 Tel bill + Calling cards to India + misc

Total per month = \$650. For two months = \$1300.

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

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

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

How do I carry my luggage at the Airport?

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

How do I travel from the Airport to the University?

Print out the [28X Airport Flyer schedule](#). This will give you the schedule of the bus that shuttles between the University Campus and the Airport. Remember to get off at the Bigelow Blvd. bus stop. You will have to pay \$2.25 as soon as you enter the bus. Hence, remember to carry exact change. You can change dollar bills to quarters at machines at the airport. In case you land at an hour when there is no bus for a very long time and you have someone waiting at the University, call for the Yellow Cab (412-321-8100).

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

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

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

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

The main Giant Eagle locations are:

Shadyside – 5550 Centre Avenue & at the crossing of Shady avenue and Ellsworth Avenue

Squirrel Hill – 1901 Murray Avenue

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

More information on housing is available [here](#).

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

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

The possible options are –

0. Rent covers everything (Rent – utilities included): That’s the best deal as you don’t have to worry about paying any extra bills every month.
0. Rent doesn’t cover electricity (Rent - utilities included except electricity): Most common. In this case make sure that the room heating and cooking is on gas. This will ensure that you will not pay more than approx \$20/month for your lighting + fans and stuff. Get this deal!
0. Rent doesn’t cover any utilities (Rent – utilities separate): Bad scenario. This would mean that you will have to pay separate bills for all the utilities. Worst case scenario – your house is old with heat leakage.

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

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

What do I do for local transportation in Pittsburgh?

Buses: Public transport by way of buses is really good in Pittsburgh contrary to other cities in the U.S. Port authority is responsible for the public buses in Pitt. These are free with the Pitt ID Card. You will realize what a huge blessing this is once you travel to other cities where the public transport is not free. The website for the buses is: <http://www.ridegold.com/> In addition you have the ‘T’. It is an underground tram service that connects some parts of Pittsburgh. The schedules and fares for the same are available on the same website as the port authority buses. You can follow the link given above and download PDF documents of the required bus schedules. For the first week, until you get your Pitt ID, you can purchase a weekly pass from Giant Eagle which will allow you to avail any number of bus rides anywhere in Pittsburgh for the entire week.

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

The link for Yellow cab: [http://www.pghtrans.com/yellow\\_cab.cfm](http://www.pghtrans.com/yellow_cab.cfm)  
Phone number for Yellow Cab: 412 – 321 - 8100 Phone number for  
People’s Cab: 412 – 466 - 8300

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

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

Where do I find furniture for my house?

Most graduate students rely on garage sales and moving sales. At these sales, you can buy basic amenities for the house, like lamps, cheap furniture, crockery items, shelves, tables, etc. These are advertised on Craig’s List (<http://pittsburgh.craigslist.org/>) and also on street intersections. Keep your eyes peeled for notices on the lamp posts on street intersections. These would be your best bet, because most of these moving sales will be in and around of where you live and it will be easier to cart anything that you may

purchase. In addition (if you are rich), you can look at Ikea furniture store, they have reasonably priced furniture.

Where do I shop for my stuff?

For stuff for the house, you can go to Wal-Mart, there are many [Wal-Marts](#) around, go to the following site to locate the Wal-Mart closest (min 30 minutes by bus from Oakland, Shadyside or Squirrel Hill) to you:  
[http://www.walmart.com/cservice/ca\\_storefinder.gsp](http://www.walmart.com/cservice/ca_storefinder.gsp)

The most accessible Wal-Mart by public transport is the one at Waterworks; it is accessible by the buses 500 and 74B. At Wal-Mart, you will get most of your household items- laundry items, bedding items, groceries, bath rugs, and utensils...basically everything! The main grocery store as I mentioned earlier is [Giant Eagle](#). You can find the store closest to you on this site. The main locations are: Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, Waterfront, Waterworks, and Southside.

The pharmacy stores (not just medicines) here are [Rite Aid](#), [CVS Pharmacy](#). In addition you also have [Eckerd](#), which is a pharmacy store and more. One of these is located on Forbes Avenue in Oakland, which is in the University area.

Where do I get calling cards to call back home?

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

Where can I get Internet access immediately?

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

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

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

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

What about internet access at home?

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

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

0. You can apply for a Verizon DSL connection. You will need a Verizon landline phone for that. The total cost of the plan will be (cheapest) approx \$39 / month. The speed will then be pretty good (around 100 kbps). They will also provide you with a router with which you can have wireless internet connection at home.

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

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

How do I go about getting my bank account?

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

How do I get a cell phone?

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

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

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

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

Where can I eat?

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

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

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

What about Entertainment and Sports?

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

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

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

What are the places I can visit in Pittsburgh?

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

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

How is the winter in Pittsburgh?

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

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

Where can I go for adventure sports in Pittsburgh?

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