International Scholar Relocation “Quick Tips”

The following are some common relocation questions international postdocs and graduate students may have when relocating to the United States to work at The Scripps Research Institute (TSRI):

**ACCOMMODATIONS**

The closest residential areas to TSRI are located in La Jolla or the University Town Center (UTC)/Golden Triangle area. Rent in La Jolla can be pricier than other areas of San Diego, but University Town Center is only about a five-ten minute drive to/from TSRI. The TSRI “classifieds” email list is an excellent resource for both temporary and permanent housing options. May of the postings on the TSRI classifieds include other scholars looking for roommates. www.Craigslist.org is a popular site for rentals and roommates, as well as www.SDReader.com. Please see the Student Life Guide for a detailed description of neighborhoods across San Diego County.

**TRANSPORTATION**

Buying a car can be a confusing, stressful process—especially for an international student or postdoc new to the country. Owning a car in the US can also be expensive. There are ownership costs (purchase price, taxes, depreciation, finance charges, registration, insurance, license fees, parking, etc.) as well as operating costs (gas, oil, annual inspections, engine maintenance, tires, etc.). Roudr (www.roudr.com) has created a buying service that not only educates you on the basics of car buying, but also supports and walks you through the entire process.

You do not need a California driver’s license to purchase a vehicle.

**Driver’s License**

In most cases, if you plan on driving, you must get a California driver’s license (http://www.dmv.ca.gov/dl/dl_info.htm). You are ok to drive on your foreign license until you receive your CA license, though in some cases an international license is required to supplement your home country’s license. Once you arrive in the U.S. you will meet with an administrator from TSRI’s International Office who will provide you with more information.

**Transportation Options**

The Coaster, San Diego Trolley and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System are San Diego’s transportation systems that will get you around San Diego. See page 4, “Getting Around”, of the Student Life Guide for more details about transportation in San Diego.

Bicycling is another common mode of transportation for scholars working at TSRI and San Diego is equipped with bike lanes and trails throughout the county. Regional bike maps, biking buddies, bike safety and much more can be found on the SANDAG website: http://www.icommutesd.com/bike/bike-to-work.
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Social Security Number
A social security number (SSN) is the closest number we have to a national identification. The SSN is linked to your earnings, tax withholdings, and credit history. Apply at your local Social Security Administration office. You must wait two weeks after entering the U.S., and 3-5 business days after the International Office activates your record before applying for an SSN.

Banks, landlords, utility, cell phone, and credit card companies will often request an SSN to obtain services.

To rent or establish utilities, and in other cases, a letter from your supervisor and/or employer may be sufficient to overcome the obstacle of not having an SSN.

Cell phone providers may require a larger security deposit due to having no U.S. credit history (see below). The deposit should be returned after one year.

Checking/Savings Account
Without a social security number you can open a checking account, deposit funds, order checks, and receive a debit card. This should help you get established. Some banks may allow you to open a savings account. After receiving an SSN you should have no issue doing so.

Credit Cards
Credit Histories do not transfer to the United States. Moreover, since you are likely just receiving an SSN you have no credit history established in the U.S. Options to quickly begin establishing a history include:

- Obtain a store charge card, such as Target or a department store. This helps jumpstart your credit history and allows you to apply for a credit card sooner.
- Joint members of NPA/AAAS can apply for an AAAS credit card.
- Secured Credit Cards can be issued with your bank account as collateral. However, these may charge fees and even interest.

Phone
No contract phones, also known as prepaid phones, are growing in availability and options. They are a great option to use as your initial phone in the United States, and depending on your needs can be a long-term option as well. If you already have friends or colleagues in the U.S., sometimes you can be added to their phone contract’s “Friends & Family” plan to save both them and you money.

Other tips or suggestions? Send them to us!

Once you have arrived and established, please help us improve this quick tip guide. For more information about relocating to the U.S., please see the National Postdoctoral Association’s [International Postdoc Survival Guide](https://www.nationalpostdoc.org/survivalguide).