Helpful Information for Incoming GSBS Students Moving to the United States from India

These hints are written for a student wanting to come well-equipped from India to the United States. If you have some sort of support in the place of your destination (e.g., relatives, friends etc.), you can definitely edit this list. Almost everything listed below is available here and is often better quality, less expensive and more appropriate for local use, but it may take you a while to discover where to buy them. Sooner or later, you will replace many things you bring from India with their local equivalents. This list assumes that you will cook for yourself. The estimated budget for the items listed below, could range from Rs. 20,000 to 40,000. In addition, you are likely to spend approximately Rs. 40,000 (which will vary from one airline to other) on an ECONOMY ONE-WAY air-ticket and Rs. 45,000 to 50,000 ($1000, appx.) for your RBI approved dollars. You'll need part of these funds for your deposit and rent on your housing. It is recommended that you take at least $2000 as it may take two months for you to collect and cash your first pay check, assuming you are receiving a graduate assistantship. This list may be biased toward a single, male student on assistantship. Make appropriate changes if you are not.

But before all that, here are a few important and useful tips:

After Receiving Your Acceptance Letter and I-20

Get in touch with the USEFI (United States Educational Foundation in India), if possible, and request the latest information about documents needed for applying for an F-1 visa.

You may apply for the visa within 90 days prior to the reporting date mentioned on the I-20.

Obtaining a Visa

You must present following materials to the Consular office at the time you apply for visa.

- Signed I-20 form. Detach the student copy of the I-20 as soon as you sign both of them. Keep it away from the original, safely with you in a folder or envelope.
- Completed visa application form (available at the consulate)
- Two passport size photographs
- Valid Passport
- Acceptance letter
- Evidence of financial support (If you have received a graduate assistantship offer, be sure to include the offer letter)
- Financial documents (original bank statement and photocopy)
- Visa fee (as applicable)
- TOEFL and GRE scores (Original + photocopy)
- Photocopy of grade cards.

Go along with a friend or a relative who has a vehicle in case you have to go and get something.

Dress professionally when you go for the visa interview. Avoid using American slang. Speak slowly and clearly and look directly into the eyes of the consular officer, even if he/she is not looking at you. Be honest and answer the questions clearly.

You should be aware that the U.S. government has imposed strict guidelines on the immigration process. Due to the subject matter that you will be studying, your request for entrance into the United States may have to pass a review in Washington, D.C. This could delay your entrance up to four months. If you are told that your application must undergo this review, please contact the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences immediately by e-mailing Carla Lee (clee@hsc.unt.edu) or Jan Sharp (jsharp@hsc.unt.edu). We can provide a letter stating the nature of your studies that may help speed your application through the process.

**Travel Arrangements**

The next thing to do is block your tickets (this implies no financial commitment). This can be done via travel agents. Make sure that the agent/agency is reputable. Request a vegetarian or Hindu meal when you make your final travel arrangements, if you are a vegetarian.

Avoid changing airlines, if at all possible. A direct flight is the best. (E.g.: Lufthansa from New Delhi to Frankfurt and from Frankfurt to Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport). If changing airlines cannot be avoided, leave at least a 4-6 hour gap between the scheduled arrival of one flight and the scheduled departure of the connecting flight. Baggage is usually safe with a single airline. Changing airlines sometimes leads to misplaced baggage. Some airlines don’t take care of baggage transfer – you may have to personally carry it from the baggage claim to the check in counter of the connecting flight (ask about this when making your travel arrangements). Our students strongly recommend that you do not trust an Indian Airlines flight. If you must use Indian Airlines, allow an extra day for travel.
Immigration Clearance

Get this after you have obtained a visa. This is usually not required but the immigration officers at the airport of departure may request it. It is best not to take unnecessary chances. For this clearance you will need the following:

- Passport and Visa
- Immigration clearance application form, available from the passport office
- Original and photocopies of the provisional degree certificate
- Required fee

Exchanging Funds

It should not be difficult to exchange funds from a Thomas Cook or American Express office. A nationalized bank may do this for you as well. Our students report that Thomas Cook the most preferred. You may also be able to exchange funds with your travel agent and may even get a better conversion rate. For this you'll need to take the following things along:

- Passport (original and photocopy)
- Airline ticket
- I-20 (student copy)
- Grade cards (originals and photocopies)
- Provisional Certificate (original and photocopy)
- 12th standard mark/pass sheet (original and photocopy)
- Admission and assistantship offer letters (original and photocopy)
- bank statement (for the source of Indian currency for buying the required dollars).
- Tax clearance certificate from your area revenue department

Things to Do

- Learn to type, drive and cook if you do not know how
- Apply for bank loan if necessary
- Make passport valid for 6 months more than your stay indicated in your I-20.
- Make outstation purchases (clothing for cold weather, cassettes etc.)
• Get medical check-up done: dental; physical exam, etc.
• Get the required immunizations
• Get prescriptions and medicines (one-year supply, if possible)
• Get your eyesight checked; purchase an extra pair of eyeglasses
• E-mail the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, giving your flight number, date and time of arrival
• Note your parents’ bank account number if they are contributing to your financial support
• Find out how to transfer funds from India to the United States to pay your tuition and fees
• It is a very good idea to purchase medical evacuation and/or repatriation insurance.

What to Bring and How to Bring It

Start your packing well in advance. Buy two good suitcases -- they should be able to withstand a lot of mishandling. They should be as large as possible within the size limitations (32 inches is normal). Put identification marks and labels both inside and outside the suitcases. The airline itself may also provide sticker labels and baggage tags to mark your luggage. Keep one photocopy of your passport, visa, I-20, etc. in each bag. Make a list of every item in the bags and estimate its value. Also write down what your suitcases look like. This will prove to be helpful in case your luggage is lost. If you have items that are valuable, either wear them or keep them in your carry-on luggage.

Suitcase Specifications:

As an example, the Air India economy class luggage specifications to the USA are given below (This usually is similar to other airlines as well but ask your travel agent or contact the respective airline office for details): 2 pieces of luggage with total linear dimension (l + b + h) not exceeding 270 cm (106”). Moreover the total linear dimension of each baggage should not exceed 158 cm (62”). The weight of each bag should not exceed 32 kg (note: they are not very particular about this -- but be realistic). In addition, you can carry a bag with linear dimension not exceeding 115 cm (45”) onboard.

Things to be kept in your carry-on luggage:

• Two-day supply of any medicine (including those for air-sickness).
• Sweater or lightweight jacket
• Original important documents (I-20, visa, tickets)
• Novels/books/magazines for in-flight reading
• Money (some cash but mostly traveler's checks).
• Address and phone book (with information on both your important Indian and US contacts)
• Copies of your passport photo
• A change of clothes and the most essential basic items required for sustaining yourself for a couple of days, in case your luggage gets lost in transit.
• An inventory of all items that you have in each suitcase

Things to be kept on your person:

• Shorter list of contact address -- especially of people coming to pick you up
• Receipt from traveler's checks in case you lose them. Do not keep the receipt and the checks together.
• Remaining amount of cash

Things to leave with a family member or close friend:

• List of addresses /phone numbers your family or friend can use to reach you in the case of an emergency. You should always leave the address, telephone number, and e-mail address of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences. It is: University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth, Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences, 3500 Camp Bowie Boulevard, Fort Worth, Texas USA 76107, Telephone: 817-735-2560, E-mail: gsbs@hsc.unt.edu
• One copy of all your important documents
• A copy of all relevant parts of medical history files
• Your tailoring measurements

What to Bring:

• Copy of all certificates/documents (originals in cabin baggage).
• Important application materials (I-20, acceptance letter, etc.)
• Necessary books/notebooks
• Copy of important addresses
• Indian postal stamps -- for sending letters through someone traveling to India
• All medical history files
• Non-technical books (fiction/religious)
• 1 pair of leather chappals and hawai chappals (with extra straps) etc.
Clothing:

Usually clothes are machine washed once a week at a local laundromat. Hence, one week supply of clothes (+ one week back up) is needed. Get all clothes a little loose -- clothes may shrink in the dryer and you may gain weight. In the summer months, Texas is quite hot (90-100 degrees F). In the winter months, the temperatures are moderately cold, rarely dipping below freezing for more than a few days at a time, but still cold enough for a coat.

- 14-15 sets of undergarments, socks, handkerchiefs
- 5 sets of good shirts, pants (bring a lot of T-shirts, which are cheap in India)
- At least one business suit for more formal occasions. Women will want to bring a few nice/formal saris or salwar kameez
- a good swimsuit + a few shorts
- 1-2 ties and 2 belts
- sweaters
- a leather or thick woolen jacket
- woolen socks/thermal underwear not recommended in Texas
- a good leather wallet or handbook
- Wear your shoes to save space in the suitcase. If needed, buy only leather shoes (other type of shoes are cheap in the US)

Household Items:

- 3-6 ordinary bath towels
- one set of bed sheets and a lightweight blanket or comforter
- do not bring Indian files/folders or punching machines (filing system in the US is different: 3 holes; A4)

Don't worry if you can't bring any of the items listed above -- most are available inexpensively in the U.S. In two months' time you'll be able to buy most of the above (unless you are not on assistantship).

Food and Kitchen Items

Below are some north/south Indian food items that may be taken:

- Masalas etc. (usually OK with US customs, if sealed in original packing with label)
- Tea/Coffee powder -- 0.2 kg (it may take some time to get used to the U.S. versions)
• Dhania-jeera powder -- 0.25 kg
• Red chilli powder -- 0.25 kg
• Turmeric powder -- 0.25 kg
• Small quantities of each of the following: cloves, cinnamon, elaichi (cardamom – white and black), cumin seeds (jeera), mustard seeds, asafoetida powder, pickles, papad (appalam)
• Different dhals in small quantities for initial phase
• Sambar powder -- 1 kg
• Rasam podi -- 0.5 kg
• Paruppu podi --1 packet and tamarind paste
• Cook book -- e.g.: "Cook and see" by Meenakshi Ammal

Note: most of these items are available in the Indian and international stores in major cities like Fort Worth and Dallas. One of the biggest complaints new international students have is adjusting to the local food. These items will help you beat the "craving" during the initial few weeks. Be realistic and bring only what you think is most important.

You may also want to bring kitchen equipment such as the following although most are readily available in the local stores:

• A pressure pan (with spare handle, 3 safety valves, 2 weights, 1 base plates, 3 gaskets) (note: big pressure cooker is not needed as you can buy a rice cooker in the US)
• SS dinner plates -- 2
• SS bowls -- 2
• Table spoons -- 2
• Teaspoons -- 2
• Fork -- 2
• Dinner knives -- 2
• Kitchen knife -- 1
• Cooking tongs for SS vessels --1 Tea strainer –1
• Ladles for serving rice --1
• Ladles for serving dal -- 1
• Tumblers -- 2
• Rolling pin and board --1 (for making chapatis)

Things to be done before and during your flight:

• Call two days before your departure and find out if there’s any change of schedule of the flight (INFORM THE PEOPLE COMING TO PICK YOU UP OF ANY SUCH CHANGE)
• Be at the airport 3-4 hrs before flight departure
• Relax during flight; sleep as much as possible
For vegetarians: watch out before you eat – you may be given a non-vegetarian meal even if you had asked for a vegetarian meal. Vegetarian food is generally bland -- fruits/juices would be a good choice. (Before ordering anything onboard, check if you have to pay for it separately.)

Don't hesitate to ask questions. If required don't hesitate to spend money.

NOTE: as far as possible ask an official only: airline attendants, airport authority, police officers, etc.

Port of entry procedures:

- Sometime before landing the flight attendant will distribute customs declaration forms and immigration forms (I-94) as mentioned below. Fill these out on the plane. You will submit them to the appropriate authorities when you land.
- Do not hesitate to ask for the flight attendants' help
- You can indicate that you have nothing to declare and that the total value of all your things is less than $100 on the form
- Form I-94. After reviewing your documents, the immigration officer will indicate length of stay, university, etc. This will be attached to your passport.
- Form I-20 (student copy). All transactions regarding your non-immigrant status will be recorded on this form. This should be retained at all times (not to be surrendered when you temporarily leave the U.S.). Your admission number will be given. Memorize and note it down somewhere.
- Just before you land, the correct local time will be announced. Set your watch. A dual time watch will come handy.
- Once you are out of the plane go straight to the immigration counter. Keep your I-20, passport, admission and assistantship letters ready. The officials might ask a few questions such as: Is this your first time in the U.S.? Are you a student? Do you have an F-1 visa? Which university will you be attending? They will attach an I-94 (arrival/departure record card)/
- You should then go to the baggage claim to retrieve your luggage (Eye-catching labels help here). Rent a cart (usually a $1 fee) to carry your bags.
- Cart your baggage to the nearby customs. If asked, tell them you are a student, F-1 visa, etc. If you are asked to open your luggage, do so patiently. Remember that customs officials are not trying to be offensive. It is their job to make sure that no one is bringing illegal items into the country.
- After you have cleared customs, go and wait at the nearest exit for the people who will be meeting you. These people have been provided with your photograph from your application file and will carry a sign with your name. If at all possible, the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences will provide you with the name of at least one of the people who will be
meeting you, as well as a mobile telephone number for the person meeting you. They should show you a student ID card when they greet you. DO NOT leave the airport with anyone that you are not certain is a representative of UNT Health Science Center. When at all possible, we will send a woman to meet a female student.

- If no one has arrived to meet you within one hour of your arrival, call Carla Lee at (817) 735-2560. Give her your exact location (e.g., the terminal and gate numbers in the airport). Try to get help from an airport official - make arrangements for a Public Announcement. People in the U.S. are usually very helpful.
- DO NOT leave the airport until someone arrives to meet you. DO NOT leave your luggage unattended at any time. Most importantly, do not panic if there are any problems. You may call Carla Lee at (817) 735-2560 if any problems do occur. A phone call from an airport pay phone will cost approximately 50 cents.

**A Final Note**

Our sister campus, University of North Texas, in Denton, Texas, has an active India Student Organization (ISO). Much of the information included here was first located on the ISO’s website. It has been reviewed and revised specifically for students entering the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth. The ISO is an organization of very friendly and helpful students and we encourage you to build friendships through this organization. However, our campuses are located 60 miles apart with no public transportation between them. If you need assistance locating housing, airport pick-up, etc. please contact the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences by e-mailing Carla Lee (clee@hsc.unt.edu) or Jan Sharp (jsharp@hsc.unt.edu).