

# 2011

## San Francisco State University Housing Guide A Handbook for SF State International Exchange Students



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## Welcome to San Francisco!

There are essentially two different housing stages you will experience during your stay in San Francisco: arrival/house-hunting, and then permanent housing. When you arrive, you will need somewhere to stay temporarily while you go through the orientation process, get settled, and look for permanent housing. We have included in this packet a list of dorm-style youth hostels in San Francisco for you to consider, along with a great deal of information and suggestions to guide you on your search for a long-term living arrangement, according to the habits and trends of San Francisco State students.

We recommend that you reserve temporary accommodations before you arrive in San Francisco first and foremost, so that you will have a specific destination when you arrive and can land on your feet. If you do not have friends or relatives in the area to stay with, booking a hostel or hotel is the best option. It is quite uncertain, and definitely unpleasant, to attempt to find permanent housing immediately after getting off a plane, with your luggage, and no knowledge of the city. Students take anywhere from 1-3 weeks on average searching for permanent housing.

**PLEASE NOTE:** If you are interested in living on-campus, it is imperative that you apply as early as possible, as space is limited. Pay close attention to the University Housing website for application deadlines: [www.sfsu.edu/~housing](http://www.sfsu.edu/~housing). More information will follow.

## Temporary Housing Accommodations

The following is a list of youth hostels located throughout San Francisco that have been reliable and hospitable to past students. Most of these accommodations are located in the downtown area, easily accessible and approximately 30-45 minutes from the SF State campus on public transportation. Although we provide their addresses and contact information here, the best option for booking beds will be to visit websites such as [www.hostelworld.com](http://www.hostelworld.com) and [www.hostelbookers.com](http://www.hostelbookers.com).



## Youth Hostels

- [Adelaide Hostel](#)
- [USA Hostels](#)
- [San Francisco Guest House](#)
- [Elements Hostel](#)
- [Pacific Tradewinds Guest House](#)
- [San Francisco Downtown Hostel](#)
- [Green Tortoise Guesthouse](#)
- [European Guest House](#)
- [Globetrotters' Inn](#)

*The University is not associated with any of these temporary housing options, nor does the University take responsibility for any of the businesses or referrals listed here. SF State cannot make any recommendations nor can reservations be made on your behalf. We recommend that you make reservations on your own prior to your arrival in San Francisco.*

## Permanent Housing Accommodations

### On-Campus Housing

#### *SF State Residence Halls (Dormitories) and Apartments*

The University has a number of options for on-campus housing, which are all listed in detail on the housing website. Please visit the website at [www.sfsu.edu/~housing](http://www.sfsu.edu/~housing), and click on the “International Students” link for more information. You may want to consider living in the “International Living Community”, which attempts to match international and U.S students as roommates as well as provide a variety of international and cross-cultural programs and activities.



Remember, housing availability is on a first-come, first-served basis. Because of the large number of applicants and limited availability of on-campus housing, interested students should apply as soon as possible. You do not need a SF State ID # to apply. We strongly recommend that you contact the **SF State Housing & Residential Services Office** by phone at **415/338-1067** or by fax at **415/338-6219** and request that

they immediately send you an on-campus housing application form.

## Minimum Estimated Monthly Rent for Unfurnished Apartments in San Francisco

- **Single Room: \$500-\$1000**
- **Studio Apartments: \$1000-\$1,200**
- **One-bedroom Apartments: \$1,200-\$1,800**
- **Two-bedroom Apartments : \$1,600-\$2,300**
- **Three-bedroom Apartments: \$2,300-\$3,000**

Depending on the neighborhood in which you live, the size of your apartment, amenities, proximity to transportation, etc., you could certainly spend much more than the minimum monthly rents stated above! Remember to include transportation expenses and utilities in your monthly costs when searching for housing accommodations.

### Off-Campus Housing



Finding permanent housing in San Francisco can be challenging and delightful simultaneously. San Francisco is famous for its unique architectural details: the stacked-up, colorful homes alongside beautiful murals and parks. San Francisco's neighborhoods are surprisingly diverse; thanks to the rollicking hills and microclimates, each neighborhood is

strikingly distinct, and the housing market reflects this phenomenon perfectly.

San Francisco houses and apartments come in various architectural styles (Victorian, modern, etc.), many sizes (studios, 1-2-3 bedrooms, etc.) and also come unfurnished or furnished.

There are a number of options for living situations, such as:

- **Sharing an apartment or house with roommates of your choice**
- **Renting an apartment by yourself**
- **Renting a room from tenants in an established household with shared common areas**
- **Renting a room with an American family**

## General Tips to Remember



It is advisable that you begin your housing search as soon as you arrive in the U.S. However, it will be very difficult if not impossible to find housing remotely *before* your arrival. It is a good idea to begin looking at websites (such as [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org), which you will become very familiar with) and orienting yourselves from home, but many roommates, families, and landlords only rent rooms and apartments to individuals whom they have had in-person contact with, usually at a viewing appointment, property management company's office, or open house. It is always a bad idea to send a deposit or sign a lease for an apartment you have never seen.

1. **Trust your gut.** If you meet a landlord or roommate and s/he seems untrustworthy, asks you for bizarre documents that you would be uncomfortable providing, or gives you a general bad feeling, then do not rent that apartment or room. Typically, your instincts in those situations are correct. Like many big cities, San Francisco is full of wacky characters, and landlords are not



exempt from this reality. Although you have plenty of rights and protections as a tenant (more information on this below), we do not want you to have an unpleasant living experience or tense relations with roommates or landlords while you're here.

2. **Don't rush.** Although we understand what a stressful time your first few weeks in San Francisco can be, between orientation, first days of classes, and house-hunting, don't feel compelled to take the very first apartment you see (unless, of course, it is your dream home). You will get a feel for things after you see a few places and be able to better discern what a quality apartment at a reasonable price looks like.

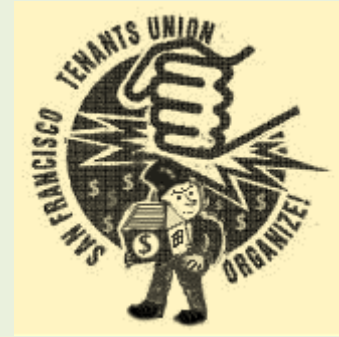
3. **Get everything in writing!** In order to protect yourself from scams or less-than-honest landlords or master tenants, it is a good idea to document all the details of your living situation as soon as the



deal is struck. If your landlord, new roommate (master tenant), or the family you are renting a room from tells you your rent is \$1200 a month, and utilities (gas, water, etc.) are included in that price, for example, have them write up a lease or document stating the conditions of the move-in

for you to sign. If you have any questions about a lease a landlord has presented to you, you can always ask your OIP advisors to help interpret.

4. **San Francisco Tenants' Union:** The San Francisco Tenants' Union is a community organization that exists as a resource for tenants to educate themselves about their rights concerning such issues as security deposits, evictions, landlord harassment, roommates, repairs, rent increases, etc., which you can find in the "Your Rights as a Tenant" section of this packet. However, if you find yourself in an uncomfortable circumstance with your landlord, it is a good idea to go to their drop-in counseling hours to talk to a tenants' rights counselor. The week's drop-in schedule, along with more information about tenants' rights rules and regulations, can be found on their website at [www.sftu.org](http://www.sftu.org) or by calling 415-282-6622.



## Apartment Complexes Located Near SF State

### Villas at Parkmerced



The recently renovated Villas at Park Merced surround the University on the South side, and chic high-rise flats and cozy townhouses are both available in studios, one-, two-, and three-bedrooms. This is a popular option among both international and domestic SF STATE students, but it can be a bit pricy.

3711 Nineteenth Ave.  
San Francisco, CA 94132  
(877) 243-5544  
[www.parkmerced.com](http://www.parkmerced.com)

### University Park Housing

The University Park apartment community is composed of [University Park North](#) located near the [Stonestown Galleria](#) and [University Park South](#). The University Park community is a great housing option for San Francisco State University faculty, staff, alumni and students. The University Park Community offers residents unfurnished one to three-bedroom apartments walking distance to the center of campus in 24 verdant acres near Lake Merced.



21 Buckingham Way  
San Francisco, CA 94132  
(415) 564-4000  
<http://www.sfsu.edu/~univpark/>

## How do I find a place to live off-campus?

The online community [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org) is the undisputed champion of housing ads in San Francisco. It is a free website for ads and forums where you can search for jobs, housing, and even romance. This is the most popular and user-friendly way to find apartments in the city.



Under the “housing” section of the main page, you can search under the “**apts/housing**” or “**rooms and shares**” links to find apartment and room vacancy listings by capacity, price range, and neighborhood all over San Francisco. The posts are either from landlords, families renting rooms in their homes, property management companies, or tenants of occupied flats seeking new roommates. Craigslist is a wonderful resource; however, beware of scam artists: Never pay a security deposit, rent, or move-in fee for an apartment you have not viewed or to a person you have not met face-to-face. For further information, Craigslist has extensive material about legitimacy, scams, and how to protect yourself on its main page.



Additionally, more and more exchange students are locating their housing and roommates through Facebook. The International Education Exchange Council has a Facebook profiles and groups that specialize in roommate pairing. For more information, search Facebook for the profile “IEEC SFSU” or join one of their semester groups.

## Neighborhood Canvassing

Drive or walk around the neighborhood(s) in which you would like to live and watch for “for rent” signs in windows. This technique, although antiquated, is a good idea to supplement your other search options if you have a particular neighborhood you’d like to live in. Read the “San Francisco District/Neighborhood Guide” for more information on neighborhoods that are specially suited for students.

## Housing for Students with Disabilities



**Independent Living Resource Center**

70 10th Street

Telephone: 415/863-0581; TTY: 863-1367

[www.ilrcsf.org/](http://www.ilrcsf.org/)



## What to Expect: Applications and Leases

As soon as you see an ad for an apartment that fits your criteria, respond in the appropriate manner (either by calling or e-mailing for an appointment or showing up promptly at an open house).

Submitting a rental application for an apartment is non-binding; it is not a legal contract, and you will not be held to anything if you decide to turn it down in favor of another unit.

Remember, the housing market in San Francisco is very competitive and you can't wait around to view apartments or submit applications. Even if you are unsure whether or not the apartment is exactly right for you, or have more apartments to view that week, apply.

After finding an apartment or room, you will typically have to turn in a rental application to the landlord, and based on that application they may offer you the apartment or room. This application will request information such as your last rental address, your current address, source of income, name of employer (if employed), bank account information, and personal references. This is obviously problematic for most international students, since

most likely you do not have a previous rental address in the U.S., are not employed, and do not have any personal references in the area. In order to remedy this issue, you will need to explain to the landlord that you are an international student who is new to San Francisco Bay Area, and provide them with documentation to prove your financial stability. These documents can include copies of your sponsor's financial documents to verify that even though you are not working, you will receive a steady source of income from your sponsor (parents, relative, friend, etc.), and even recent bank statements. Landlords will vary on how much importance they place on personal income, credit references, etc., and some may be reluctant or unwilling to rent to students.

Once you have been approved to move into the apartment, the landlord will ask you to sign a lease or some type of agreement. A lease is a contract in which the landlord allows you to use his property for a certain time and for an agreed upon price. This contract will specify such things as the date the rent is payable each month, the amount of the rent and security deposit, your responsibility to maintain the property, the landlord's responsibility for the repair and upkeep of the apartment, regulations on pets and the landlord's requirements if and when you plan to leave the apartment. **Be sure that you read and understand your lease before you sign**

**it!** If you do not thoroughly understand your lease you may find yourself in violation of it without knowing, which can gravely affect your security deposit.

Security deposits are refundable deposits that a landlord may apply to any expenditures incurred in which you may have damaged the property, failed to pay rent, or were negligible in cleaning the property before vacating. If you follow the requirements of the lease, the entire security deposit should be returned to you soon after you move out.

**In addition to the signing of the lease, you will need to pay the "move-in" cost, which is often the first month's rent (or rent prorated for the first month), plus the last month's rent and a security deposit. The last month's rent is requested to insure that the landlord is given one month's advance notice before you plan to leave the apartment.**

**NOTE:** Frequently landlords will ask for a credit check fee of approximately \$20 per applicant. This will typically not apply to you as international students, since you likely don't have credit in the U.S., and don't hesitate to remind them of this. Some companies may ask for a simple application processing fee of around \$20 – don't pay much more than this.

## San Francisco District/Neighborhood Guide

Once you have made some basic decisions about where you would like to live, you can then start to narrow your search. The best way to determine the neighborhood for you is to spend some time there. Get a meal, go to a café, and stroll or bike around the neighborhood to see the style of houses for a day. Be thorough; many of these neighborhoods are quite large and their main streets or most attractive corners can be hard to find. Generally, the highest populations of students and young people can be found in the Inner Mission, Upper and Lower Haight, and the Inner and Outer Sunset.

**The Mission** The Mission District is known as the “Sun Belt” of San Francisco because the weather here is usually quite sunny and warm, even when the rest of the city is blanketed in fog. Housing is mostly low



cost, colorful Victorian flats and houses, however, prices are rising due to the popularity of this neighborhood with students and young people. This neighborhood is the home of many Spanish-speaking Latino residents and families, and many of the stores and restaurants are Hispanic. The Valencia corridor is the up-and-coming hip area of the city, lined with restaurants, cafes, clothing stores, and nightspots. For

some students, this neighborhood may be slightly unnerving; it is densely populated and at times unglamorous (for example, the homeless population is very visible here). It is conveniently located on the BART line.

**Haight & Ashbury** Historic Haight-Ashbury is the famously free-spirited district of San Francisco. Haight Street is a bustling shopping area with many cafes, boutiques, and tourists. The apartments in this neighborhood are mostly well-kept Victorians and it is flanked to the North and West by the Panhandle and Golden Gate Park. East of Divisadero, the neighborhood feels more calm and residential. Haight is conveniently located near Castro, Duboce Triangle, Alamo Square, with several major bus lines to downtown and the Sunset.



**The Sunset** A very residential neighborhood with many flats, houses and apartments, this area of San Francisco is very quiet and safe. Bordered by Golden Gate Park and Ocean Beach, the Sunset District is also home to San Francisco Zoo. The weather here is often cool and foggy, but on a sunny day, it can be one of the liveliest neighborhoods in the City. SF State is located in this neighborhood, so this district is home to a great number of university students, faculty and staff. The Inner and Outer Sunset cover the majority of West San Francisco, it is one of the cheapest areas to live in San Francisco, and landlords in this area are more receptive to students.



**The Castro** The Castro is famously a mecca for the LGBTQ population, especially for gay men. It is a vibrant, bustling neighborhood, with many historic and scenic cafes, outrageous shops, and colorful natives. The Castro is a hotspot for the booming gay and lesbian nightlife in SF. The area is generally sunny and extremely safe. One of its main perks is its central location; a stone's throw from the Haight, a 5-10 minute walk to the Mission, and with two stops on the M Muni Line that goes directly to SF State, the Castro is a great neighborhood for students.



There are, of course, many other neighborhoods in San Francisco where you can choose to live. Here we have provided a few local websites with comprehensive neighborhood guides for the rest of San Francisco:

<http://www.sfgate.com/traveler/guide/sf/neighborhoods/>

<http://www.zurdogo.com/neighborhoods/>

<http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/ca/san-francisco/>

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~oip/j1exchangestudent/Housing/2011 Housing Facts Sheet.pdf>

## Your Rights as a Tenant

Under the law, both the landlord and the tenant have rights and responsibilities. Listed in this section are some of your basic rights as a tenant. Should problems arise, there are many housing agencies in this city to contact along with the Tenants Union, which we mentioned earlier, such as the Human Rights Commission Fair Housing Unit (415/558-4901) and the San Francisco Housing Authority (415/468-3800).

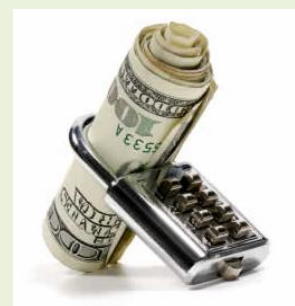


## Housing Discrimination

1. You cannot be refused to rent a property because of your race, sex, religion, marital status, physical disability, or because you have children. If you feel you have been discriminated against, call the Human Rights Commission listed above or the SF State Legal Resource Center at 415/338-2321.
2. You cannot be refused to rent a furnished property because of your sexual orientation. However, for tenants wanting a roommate for a “share rental” situation, they may request men or women roommates only.

## Deposits

1. If you are going to rent a furnished property, the landlord cannot demand a deposit of more than three-month’s rent. If you are going to rent an unfurnished place, the landlord cannot require a deposit of more than two-month’s rent.
2. Your deposit is able to earn 5% interest. Your landlord must be able to provide you with your interest annually on your anniversary date of moving in.
3. When you move out, your landlord cannot keep your deposit to pay for repairs, which are due to normal wear and tear.
4. If you vacate the apartment and your security deposit is not returned, your landlord must be able to provide you with a written statement as to how your deposit was used. Your landlord must be able to justify the amount. If you disagree with your landlord, you can contest his charges in Small Claims Court.



## Rent Increases

1. Your rent may be increased only once a year according to the Annual Rent Increase. This increase is between 4% and 7% of your rent, and is determined by the Rent Board on March 1 annually.
2. If your landlord decides to increase your rent, she/he must inform you in writing at least 30 days before the increase.



## Repairs

1. A landlord must make a place habitable before it is rented out.

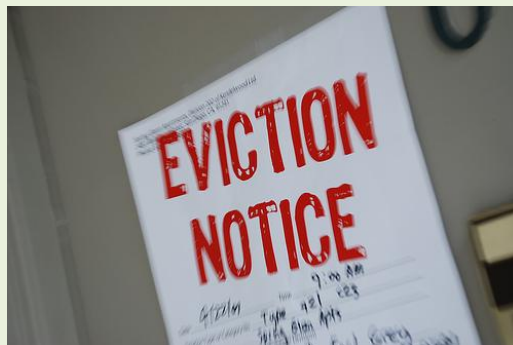
**Each unit must have these minimum conditions:**

- No leaks when it rains
- No broken doors, entrance locks or windows
- Heater working & safe
- Floors & stairways in good condition
- Plumbing works with hot and cold water
- Adequate garbage bins
- Lights and wiring working and safe
- Unit clean & no garbage, roaches or rodents

2. If the landlord fails to do the requested repairs within a reasonable amount of time, there are several steps you can take:
  - You can take care of the repairs yourself and deduct the cost from your rent (cost cannot exceed one-month's rent). Be sure to inform your landlord prior to doing the repairs and save all receipts.
  - You can move out, and not be required to complete the duration of your lease. Be sure you have documented your repair requests. Consult a tenant's counselor for advice.
  - You can withhold your rent payment. It is recommended that you first speak with a tenant's counselor.

## Evictions

1. If you have a month-to-month agreement and your landlord wants you to move out, you may ask for a 30 day written notice. If you refuse to move, your landlord can sue you in court.
2. If you have not been paying your rent, your landlord can present you with a notice requesting that you either pay or vacate within three days.
3. Your landlord does not have the legal right to enter your home and remove you and your possessions. She/he needs to go through a very structured process with the courts.



## Privacy

Your landlord must respect your right to privacy. She/he can enter your apartment only in the following situations:

- In an emergency such as a fire
- To make necessary repairs
- When you have vacated the property
- If she/he has obtained a court order



## Moving Out

When you decide to move out, you should give your landlord a written notice 30 days prior to leaving. Your landlord may agree to shorter advance notice.

The Office of International Programs wishes you the best of luck in the search for your new home in  
San Francisco!